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The new woman and the new science feminist writing 1880-1900

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**THE NEW WOMAN AND THE NEW SCIENCE:
FEMINIST WRITING 1880-1900**

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of the University's requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

In this thesis I contend that evolutionary scientific discourses were integral to the work of “New Woman” writers of late Victorian literary culture in Britain. In the cultural debates that raged over the new gender politics and their relationship to social and moral values at the fin de siècle, the questions raised about femininity, modernity and the “woman question” were also central to the “new sciences” of sexology, eugenics, psychology and anthropology.

This thesis investigates the issue of whether the new sciences offered an enabling set of discourses to New Women through which to produce new artistic, professional and personal feminine identities and to campaign for feminist goals. An understanding of the field of cultural production informs this discussion; I argue that science functions as cultural and symbolic capital in literary production of the period, and consider the dynamics between constructs of value, status, and the feminine in the literary market-place and their relationship to scientific narratives.

This analysis is developed through the illumination of the relationship between New Woman novelists and poets, female aesthetes, and other forces in the field, in discussion of the thematic concerns and literary strategies of those participating in these debates: amongst others, Mona Caird, “Iota” (Katherine Mannington Caffyn), Victoria Cross(e) (Annie Sophie Cory), Sarah Grand (Frances Elizabeth McFall), Vernon Lee (Violet Paget), Alice Meynell, May Kendall, Constance Naden, and the anti-New Woman male writer, Grant Allen. An examination of a variety of literary forms and genres, in addition to the novel – the principal focus for much scholarship on the New Woman – such as the feminist periodicals, poetry, journalism and the

short story, is central to the thesis and enables identification of shared literary strategies and techniques as well as consideration of readers and critical contexts.

The roles and representation of “woman” in this period were produced within biological determinist concepts of sex and Nature. The study concentrates on ways in which essentialist dichotomies of cultural and biological reproduction redefined notions of literary and artistic “genius”, motherhood and female citizenship, as they intersect with “race” and sexuality in imperial contexts. Women’s critique and construct of these subjectivities differed; study of the women’s journals reveals a consumer culture saturated in discourses of health and hygiene, negotiated by a divided community of readers. Focus on theories and representation of the child in late Victorian culture finds that Alice Meynell’s writing challenged evolutionary psychology, and relates Sarah Grand’s child genius to emergent Galtonian eugenics. I argue that late nineteenth-century feminism was intimately involved in imperialism and eugenics, and suggest that current feminist scholarship must confront and analyse these investments.

In this thesis I find that boundaries between the groups’ identities are fluid; points of intercourse and affiliation are revealed, such as the ways in which scientific constructs of “race”, as in Mona Caird’s use of the Celtic, are deployed in order to comment on literary value. I have highlighted the ambivalences at work in these appropriations, and suggest that the New Woman text was not always polemical, nor did it reject “high art” values, and that the female aesthetes also express feminist convictions. I contend that for many feminist writers, participation in these late nineteenth-century debates was a necessary and productive critical intervention, with radical, if not always progressive, implications.

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Abbreviations

Anthologies

- NCWP* *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets*. Armstrong, Isobel and Joseph Bristow with Cath Sharrock, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- VWP* *Victorian Women Poets*. Leighton, Angela and Margaret Reynolds, eds. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995.
- WV* *Women's Voices: An Anthology of the Most Characteristic Poems by English, Scotch, and Irish Women*. Sharp, Elizabeth Amelia, ed. London, Walter Scott, 1887.

Nineteenth-century journals

- WS* *The Woman's Signal* (1894 – 1899).
- WH* *The Woman's Herald* (1891-1893).
- WPP* *The Woman's Penny Paper* (1888-1891).

Primary texts

Allen, Grant

- ‘CP’ ‘The Child of the Phalanstery’. *Belgravia* 54 (1884): 163-176.
- SS* *Strange Stories*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1884.
- WBB* *What's Bred in the Bone*. London : Titbits Offices, 1891.

- LS* *The Lower Slopes: Reminiscences of Excursions Around the Base of Helicon, Undertaken for the Most Part in Early Manhood.* London: Elkin Matthews & John Lane, 1894.
- WWD* *The Woman Who Did* (1895) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- ASS* *A Splendid Sin.* London: F.V White and Co., 1896.

Brooke, Emma Frances

- SW* *A Superfluous Woman.* London: William Heinemann, 1894.
- LA* *Life the Accuser.* London: William Heinemann, 1896.

Caird, Mona

- DD* *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894). New York: Feminist Press, 1989.

Cross(e), Victoria (Annie Sophie Cory)

- TWWD* *The Woman Who Didn't.* London: John Lane, 1895.
- AL* *Anna Lombard* (1901). London: John Long, 1902.

Grand, Sarah (Frances Elizabeth McFall)

- HT* *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) Michigan: Michigan University Press, 1992.
- BB* *The Beth Book* (1897; reprint of 1898 edn.) Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994.
- 'TU' 'The Undefinable: A Fantasia'. *Emotional Moments* (1908) *Daughters of Decadence: Feminist Fiction at the Fin de Siècle.* Ed. Elaine Showalter. London: Virago, 1993: 262-87.

“Iota” (Caffyn, Katherine Mannington)

YA *A Yellow Aster*. London: Hutchinson and Co., 1894.

CS *A Comedy in Spasms*. London: Hutchinson and Co., 1895.

Lee, Vernon (Violet Paget)

‘OO’ ‘Oke of Okehurst’. *Hauntings: Fantastic Stories*. London: William
Heinemann, 1890.

‘AD’ ‘Amour Dure’. *Hauntings: Fantastic Stories*. London: William Heinemann,
1890.

[10 Sept1999. Victorian Women Writers Project Indiana University

<http://www.indiana.edu/~letrs/vwwp/lee/hauntings.html>]

Meynell, Alice

TC *The Children* (1896) London: John Lane, 1897.

Naden, Constance

CPW *The Complete Poetic Works of Constance Naden*. London: Bickers and
Son, 1894.

Sully, James

‘BS’ ‘Babies and Science’. *Cornhill* 43 (June-July 1881).

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Introduction

This thesis is concerned with British New Woman writers and their relation to evolutionary science during the period 1880-1900. The subjects of my enquiry are feminist writers of prose in fiction and criticism, such as Sarah Grand (Frances Elizabeth McFall), Mona Caird, Vernon Lee (Violet Paget), Alice Meynell, Victoria Cross(e)¹ (Annie Sophie Cory), and “Iota” (Katherine Mannington Caffyn), and of poetry, such as May Kendall and Constance Naden. The thesis will investigate whether the “new sciences” provided an enabling set of discourses with which the concerns of New Woman feminisms might be articulated. New Woman fiction will be treated as a female-authored genre, but the work of both their female and male interlocutors – in particular Grant Allen – is read as an important dialectic in the consideration of the way in which feminist identities were *established and contested in the literary field*.

Recent studies have remarked on the dual nature of the New Woman in fact and fiction; my study discusses the New Woman as a literary, discursive phenomenon, and examines the way in which the writers’ lives are represented, both self-reflexively and by their critics. It poses the question, how does late-Victorian feminist writing contest and reproduce dominant scientific representations of gender and modernity? The staging of these debates will be read in conjunction with the relative values of production in a literary field structured by questions of gender, authorship, capital and status. The study will explore the dialectic between periodical press representations and feminist roles in

shaping these debates during the years of the height of the New Woman in the late 1880s and 1890s.

Scholarship on the New Woman is divided in its analysis of what can be admitted to the definition of a New Woman writer. The definition toward which I work here does not include all late-Victorian writers interested in women or sexual politics – as some scholars have suggested (Ardis, 1990) – or indeed, all women writers at the end of the nineteenth century: to do so would undermine the usefulness of this category in making identifications and critical distinctions. I read New Woman fiction as that only by female authors, although fiction *about* the New Woman might be male or female authored. The feminisms of the New Women were multiple; what constitutes “feminism”, itself a term introduced from the French into English only in the late nineteenth century, as feminist historians have noted, is not a unified voice but a diversity of ideological positions and platforms, making *classification of texts a difficult, and for twenty-first-century feminism, value-laden enterprise*. I make the identification of the various strands of feminism produced through various ideological affiliations which New Women did, or did not promote in their writing, central in defining and enriching our understanding of the term.

Ann Heilmann (2000) defines the New Woman writers’ goal as polemic, arguing that they were “primarily concerned with getting their feminist politics across” through “direct, immediate and unequivocal appeal” to a feminist agenda.² Whilst much New Woman fiction was didactic, this does not mean that we can postulate some sort of transparency in the language and rhetoric of feminism. On the contrary, we must attend to the ways in which the feminist

novel always produces its intelligibility as a commodity and in relation to cultural capital. Jane Eldridge Miller, in her study of feminism and the Edwardian novel also stresses the didacticism of New Woman novels and suggests that they were

indeed polemical, but the New Woman novelists were unconcerned whether critics perceived them as *bona fide* realists or not, for they saw themselves as disciples of a social, not a literary, movement. Although their sexual frankness, their almost scientific scrutiny of psychological responses and physical sensations and their efforts to confront the hidden and sometimes sordid aspects of life were all influenced by the new realism, New Woman novels were first and foremost purpose novels.³

This study concurs to an extent with this characterisation of the New Woman novel as having a social purpose, but posits a more dialogical relationship between New Woman writers and the other movements in the literary market, and a less bifurcated view which recognises both the political intent and the negotiation with aesthetic literary values which this fiction enacts.

Even if they shared identities – those largely of British and colonial, white, middle and upper-class women – the formal and thematic concerns of the New Women writers were not represented by a united set of cultural producers in one literary field. As Rita S. Kranidis has suggested, “the differences between various feminist novels ultimately serve more as an indication of their authors’ negotiations with the cultural economy including textual and general ideologies than as expressions of distinct feminist philosophies or specific authorial

ideologies.”⁴ Although clear ideological positions and identifications with certain political campaigns can be identified, the dynamics of their interaction with other literary movements and aesthetic agendas of the period do not allow a unified or consistent subjectivity for the New Woman writer to be posited. The professional networks and social circles in which women writers moved prove that one term does not need to be exclusive of another; literary fields were not so totally self-contained as to prevent writers from straddling them.

If political engagement were the primary factor in defining who the New Woman was, as Ardis (1990) has stressed, then this methodological emphasis, suggests Talia Schaffer, “helps us define the New Women’s difference from the female aesthetes, who remained comparatively disengaged from the gender debates of the 1890s”.⁵ In my aim to retain a sense of the complexity of women’s writing at the turn of the century, I observe Schaffer’s recommendation to “reconsider the texts, techniques, and definitions that feminist critics normally use to analyse New Woman writers”,⁶ and therefore I include in the study some of those women writers who may be termed “female aesthetes”. The counter-cultural figure of the New Woman clearly stands in opposition to the cultural conservatism of the female aesthetes in many ways, yet this thesis will foreground the feminist values and interest in gender articulated by such writing by situating it in the turn-of-the-century cultural contexts it shares with the New Woman, and in highlighting the instabilities of fin-de-siècle feminism, will also question such categories as “radical” and “conservative”.

In my presentation of the work of the essayist and poet Alice Meynell, considered today as a female aesthete, I demonstrate that she faced some of the

same rejection and criticism by the establishment as the New Woman over her proximity to the professional and (male) discourses of evolutionary psychology. Even if they were not explicitly feminist, but simply because they were women, female aesthetes faced the same critical double standard against which men's writing was invariably judged higher than women's. If they used oblique techniques in negotiating their female identity in writing about the (scientific) topics they address, or in conveying feminist positions, do these writers deserve less notice from feminist critics than their more polemical sisters?

Writers as diametrically opposed as Sarah Grand and Vernon Lee both satirised and critiqued male aestheticism, whilst drawing on its stylistic qualities to present feminist critiques of misogynist aesthetics. The techniques of displacement, such as Lee's use of the supernatural, allegory and myth, expressed not only formalist concerns, but allowed her to develop critical perspectives on cultural practices and attack the patriarchal values they expressed. Interrogation of the field through the discussion of women writers not identifiable as New Women because of their association with "high" literary forms such as the literary essay – like Vernon Lee in chapter 3, and Alice Meynell in chapter 6 – reveals differing and shared feminist perspectives and rhetorical strategies, and resemblances to those considered to be New Woman writers, like Mona Caird, as I suggest in chapter 7.

Rita S. Kranidis (1995) defines New Woman fiction as characterised by a political force in opposition to that of the cultural conservatism of aesthetic ideology, but this view is qualified in my critique of the ways in which feminist discourse is not always radically subversive, nor strictly opposed to the techniques

or values of this ideology. As well as the aim of communicating feminist ideas and politicising readers, writers like Mona Caird, Victoria Cross, and even Sarah Grand were always engaged with stylistic and aesthetic considerations. By drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the field, my reading of the novels suggests that there is a greater heteroglossia or dialogism than those analyses which find New Woman writing as either aiming at aesthetic or polemical ends; instead, using science as the focus for analysis, my reading finds a variety of position-taking. An analysis of pervasive and recurrent uses of the "new" sciences by women across different discursive fields enables aesthetic and ideological affiliations between literary identities to be identified without solidifying these categories, and demonstrates the slippage between them.

Studies of the New Woman have characteristically centred exclusively on the novel form, situating it within a history of the novel in relation to realism and the emergence of modernism. Teresa Mangum (1998) and Angelique Richardson (2000), for example, have focused on how New Women revised the traditional formal confines of the realist marriage plot in their zeal to reform the male romance with the hopes of eugenicist feminism. Ann Ardis (1990), Jane Eldridge Miller (1994), and Lyn Pykett (1992, 1995) have argued that New Women novelists were proto-modernists, experimenting with narrative structures, disrupting divisions of high and low art, and problematising a unified self. This reassessment of the impact of popular New Woman fiction on literary history and its subsequent disappearance from the canon has been foundational in the history of this field of study; it is not my aim here to interrogate the historical trajectory

into modernism taken by these novelists – that has already been done successfully.

One result of this focus on the phenomenon of the New Woman novel has been that other forms of literary production, for example the work of female poets⁷ and journalists, have been marginalized, or remain largely separate from the wider contexts of the New Woman. Because of their manifold approaches, literary and political, the New Women generated outcomes which exceed a single, unified goal; I concentrate on close readings in a number of forms – journalism, novels, short stories and poetry – in order to consider the variety of strategies deployed by women writers specific to the properties of particular forms and genre, and the resistance they encounter based on their respective literary and cultural value. For example, feminist concerns about the modern woman and evolutionary narratives were voiced in verse; techniques such as humour and satire – less prominent in the novels – were used to explore women's engagement in the public roles and debates of science and even to attack anthropomorphism.

Women writers' relationship to the developments in Darwinian explanations of social structures and economies was characteristically varied and conflicting. Kranidis states of "Social Darwinism", that "[i]n addition to being a theory of human nature and a justification of gender inequalities, it is an oppressive translation of women's history, and one that feminists sought to revise".⁸ Rather than positing an essentially hostile and stable relationship between oppressor and oppressed in women's relation to what Kranidis, problematically, calls Social Darwinism,⁹ my study finds the relationship between science and the New Woman historian to be more productive and complex in the

way in which feminists' use of Darwinism differentiates and allows us to group authors. More recently, Angelique Richardson (2000; 2001) and Carolyn Burdett (2000) have interrogated New Woman writers' relationship to Darwinist concepts; Richardson has investigated what she has usefully termed "eugenic feminism" in various pronatalist visions across a range of New Woman fiction, and Burdett traces the ideological affinities of feminism with the eugenicist and imperialist hopes for race motherhood outlined by Karl Pearson. By looking at both "canonical" New Woman texts such as *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894) and *The Beth Book* (1897), the less familiar novels of Victoria Cross and "Iota", and under-researched texts such as the feminist periodicals discussed in chapter 1, I consider in a broader context what the New Woman's use of hereditarian and eugenic discourse was, both formally and critically.

On the question of their use of language, Sally Ledger foregrounds the problems inherent in a marginalized group using the language of the dominant group in order to challenge it; she cites Carrol Smith-Rosenberg: "[o]n the simplest level, for the marginal or powerless to challenge the dominant discourse, they must frame their challenge in a language meaningful within the hegemonical discourse. Moreover, to speak always in the language of the marginal frustrates those who wish to exercise power".¹⁰ Ledger responds that there are disadvantages to this relationship, "since the parameters of the debate have thereby been laid down by that dominant discourse, leaving the challenger hidebound by the vocabulary available in which to frame a challenge."¹¹ As Ledger suggests, to use the same discourse is to some extent to keep that discourse in play, to affirm and consolidate it through retaining its terms as those

which organize the debate. But to argue that feminists will always be trapped within a slavish dialectic by using the master's discourse presupposes that there is one, unified, dominant discourse being imposed upon a subordinate group.

I do not wish to argue that there is a state of relativity in which each group discourse has equal power; yet this supposition does not reflect the variety of groups using evolutionary discourse or the problematic issue of to whom it "belonged" at a time of increased access of women to public discourse. Lyn Pykett has suggested that "[p]erhaps because it simply reverses the dominant discourse, the feminist counter-discourse retains its contradictions. Many of the New Woman writers, for example, seem actively to (re)construct a biologically essentialist ideology of sexual difference"¹² – a reading which implies a fixed dynamic between dominant and counter-discourse. There was not simply a reversal of the dominant discourse; for example many female eugenisists also promoted this ideology of separate spheres in which women would preside over the home and hearth; both feminists and (male) eugenisists promoted racial maternity often from convergent positions. Foucauldian notions of power and discourse and the way in which resistance is mounted in a reverse discourse possess particular relevance for the consideration of New Woman writing. Because Darwinian theory contained contradictions, ambiguities and complexities sustained by its manifold interpretations, groups were enabled to interpret and strategically mobilise its implications.

As an authoritative, establishment discourse, orthodox science could denote modernity and cultural legitimacy for women writers through which to model the presentation of feminist values and goals. The study will examine how

the strategic use of science operates in “high” and “low” literary genres and forms through a focus on the polyvalency of scientific language in the presentation of perspectives on social structures and social change. Consideration of ways in which appeals to the empiricism, rationality and modernity of evolutionary science are nonetheless combined with the continuity of Romantic presentation of emotion, primitivism and authenticity in the representation of art and “genius”, will be a focus of discussion in chapters 4, 6 and 7.

New Women’s engagement with evolutionary sciences was a testament to their modernity, but it was not necessarily a transgressive or progressive modernity. What we learn about the intercourse between late nineteenth-century New Woman and the anthropological and medical discourses of the new sciences is often unpalatable or offensive to the feminist scholarship of white, middle-class Western women in the twenty-first century. It poses a challenge to the basis of what is included in feminist interest, and questions the critical presuppositions made in a generic “woman”’s history. Women’s involvement in imperialism and the race and class politics of eugenics has been highlighted in recent studies.¹³ Greater critical distance is still needed in feminist scholarship of the feminism of the past, and I have aimed to persist in situating the New Woman in the contextual social strands from which she produced her identities, such as the imperialism and eugenics which informed racial maternity and “genius” examined in chapters 6 and 8 respectively.

The new female subjectivities imagined by the largely middle and upper-class New Woman were often defined in relation to racial and class hierarchies which were inflected with a strong sense of identification with, and investment in,

imperialist identities. In their campaigns for greater control over sexuality, many women sought to retain a monogamous marriage ideal, often for eugenic reasons. Setting out to find conceptual links between New Woman writing and second wave feminism, as Heilmann (2000) does, risks ideological differences and instabilities becoming downplayed or even effaced. Feminism is not, and never has been, inclusive in its analysis of “woman”, and it can present a stronger unified front to its opponents, paradoxically, if it can be open to recognising the historical and critical differences which have constituted its perspectives and goals.

The New Woman

‘Who made the “New Woman”?’

said the Journalist, ‘I

When my fancy ran high,

I made the New Woman.’

Woman’s Signal (1895)¹⁴

The capitalised title of the “New Woman” of the 1890s¹⁵ – whether originally coined by a detractor, Ouida, in May 1894, as Ellen Jordan has claimed, or by her supporters in the women’s periodical press in August 1893 as Michelle Elizabeth Tusan has argued more recently¹⁶ – was appropriated by those antagonistic toward women’s success in the popular literary market, and deployed both to generalise and denigrate women’s efforts at mobilising feminist politics, clumping together writers from different and antagonistic camps – for example Grant Allen

with Mona Caird – in order to weaken their causes. The figure of the New Woman was, above all, diverse and contradictory. A late nineteenth-century novelist, social and political reformer, essayist and poet, she was also a prominent discursive construction in the literary culture of late-Victorian Britain. As a textual figure, she was mobilised by her supporters to generate debate on social change in relation to women's political and cultural status. There is a heterogeneity and hybridity as a result of the struggle over the representation of the New Woman between self-styled New Woman writers, the popular press and other social and scientific commentators. The era of the New Woman extends beyond the dates of my study from earlier feminist figures in the nineteenth century well in to the twenty-first, although scholarship in literary and social history typically assigns the 1880s and 1890s as the period when the first-wave feminists were writing; the figure continued to be reflected in the prose and political life of the Edwardian age.

Feminists brought concerns over widening women's access to the public sphere in politics, education and other offices into public debate. The campaigns of the social purity feminists against the Contagious Diseases Acts and the conditions of prostitution, were focused on moral reform and the marriage question. Not all women who campaigned for social and political power saw this as incompatible with their "womanly" and socially sanctioned roles as wives and mothers. On the contrary, these identities would be reconstructed within the language of social and moral purity by campaigners who attacked the dichotomy between education and a career, and marriage. In addition to those pressing for premarital chastity for men as well as women, there was a significant group of

intellectuals agitating not only for greater knowledge of sex relations for young women and men (as some of the social purity campaigners did), but also advocacy of contraceptive practices..

As another of the dissonant figures of the fin de siècle generating the instability of sexual politics, the New Woman was often associated with the Decadent or the Aesthete, and the homosexual, as Elaine Showalter (1982, 1991) and Linda Dowling (1986) have argued. Despite their identification with other sex “degenerates”, the perceived feminisation of literature by cultural commentators who saw women as invading the literary market meant that “woman” was also associated with the masses and with “low” culture, and thus, with a cultural degeneration which threatened the masculinised “high” art. Andreas Huyssen (1986) remarks that it is “striking to observe how the political, psychological and aesthetic discourse around the turn of the century consistently and obsessively genders mass culture and the masses as feminine, while high culture, whether traditional or modern, clearly remains the privileged realm of male activities.”¹⁷ The dichotomy between “high” and “low” forms was gendered; so too was “art” and “purpose”, as some women writers sought to differentiate the aims of their literary projects from those of male decadents and aesthetes.

The New Science

“What was decided among the prehistoric Protozoa cannot be annulled by Act of Parliament.”

Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex* (1889) ¹⁸

The ideas of evolutionary science saturate the cultural narratives and discourses of the turn of the century, creating newly secularised explanations for socio-economic formations and the disciplining of gendered subjectivities. Recent discoveries in biology and debates over hereditarian paradigms generated new understandings of the self, memory and will in the domain of evolutionary psychology, and my study demonstrates through new readings the ways in which scientific language and tropes are embedded in women’s narratives.

In his study of sexuality in the nineteenth century, Michel Foucault (1978) identifies a linked system of “perversity-heredity-degenerescence” which was central to the biologico-moral responsibility of eugenic theory as well as other new technologies of sex, such as the new sciences of sexual pathology and psychology which were concerned with promoting a notion of an “essential” femininity. Theories of degeneration based on distinctions of civilisation and barbarity, sustained by fixed class and “race” as well as gender identities contributed to the consolidation of anthropology as a discipline.

August Weismann’s theory of the germ-plasm outlined in *Essays upon Heredity and Kindred Biological Problems*, published in England in 1889,¹⁹ posited an immutable unit of heredity, unmodifiable by outside influences; it

challenged the prevalent notions of organic memory within Lamarckian inheritance theories advanced by leading biologists Ernst Haeckel, Théodule Ribot and others. Weismann conceived that hereditary traits were passed on not only between the parent and offspring, but intergenerationally, thereby suggesting a new, and troubling, relationship between an individual and their ancestral past. Although I have referred to the “new” science, the study will argue that the prevalence and continuity of Lamarckianism – a theory of the acquisition of new characteristics through environmental influence and the hereditary transmission of use and disuse of certain characteristics – was of especial value to feminist social reformers whose emphasis was upon changing social conditions of circumstance and environment; this meant that older discourses of science were contiguous with the “new” well into the twentieth century.

The implications of post-Darwinian science were manifold for feminists engaged with seeking social change and imagining futurity. Permeating paradigms of sexual science in biology and psychology were economies of the equivalence between the female body and mind which detractors of the New Woman used against her, especially in her demands for higher education and female suffrage. The linkage of femininity with modernity as an organic outcome to the natural process of evolution is central to the New Woman’s socio-cultural representation. In the rhetoric of feminists, modern femininity is the natural, hence inevitable, outcome of the processes of evolutionary change. Yet her opponents argued that the New Woman was unnatural, an aberration symptomatic of degeneration and heralding social decay – precisely the opposite of that

progressive, regenerative “womanly” role which feminists argued for her. Feminist interpretations of the Darwinian theory of sexual selection which featured so centrally in *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) conferred a new agency upon women in determining the fitness of the coming “race”; by choosing the best, healthiest partners, women would reform men and marriage. Woman’s investment in such ideas was precarious, because, for example, many male commentators argued that her proximity to nature meant that sexual maternity was her only role in contributing to national progress. Science was predominantly a masculinised discourse from which women were excluded at material levels, such as access to the scientific academy.

The other prime, but diametrically opposed, role in national cultural productivity and creativity to come under the scrutiny of science was that of the “genius”, an identity which was a significant register of ideas of both “racial” progress and degeneracy. The notion of the “woman of genius” was therefore a contested one of considerable importance to establishing the legitimacy of female cultural participation and production .

The field of literary production

“the *fundamental law* of the field, i.e. the theory of art for art’s sake [...] is to the field of cultural production what the axiom ‘business is business’ [...] is to the economic field”.

Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Literary Production* (1983).²⁰

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the field of cultural production has been useful methodologically in considering the dynamics at work in the context of New Woman literature. Bourdieu characterises the field of literary production as a self-contained structure, responding to economic and social forces, yet governed by its own laws and agents. Its structure is determined by the positions between different agents, governed by the relative power they hold in the field; thus it is sometimes called the "field of struggles". The theory provides an analysis which is not based on one of internal structures or intertextual reading, as in both formalism and structuralism; nor does it assume that literary works simply reflect a social world and the economic, material and ideological determinants of it. Rather, it is predicated on a combination of these factors in relation to a system of social relations of producers, agents and institutions. As Peter D. McDonald has suggested:

[Bourdieu] insists upon the social and material conditions of intertextuality itself. For him, a writer's participation in an intertextual network (Foucault's 'field of strategic possibilities') simultaneously implicates him or her in a network of value, or disputes about value, which is ultimately grounded in the non-discursive social structure of the field.²¹

In the field there is an economy of practices by which cultural producers negotiate two important forms of capital: cultural, which concerns cultural knowledge and competencies, and symbolic capital which refers to prestige or celebrity. In cultural production, which Bourdieu calls the "economic world reversed",

economic profit can compromise symbolic capital: in order to gain these forms of cultural legitimacy, producers may eschew economic capital. The history of the field, as a product of forces, is constituted by power struggles. It is therefore always dynamic and we can only understand the strategic use of discourse as a negotiation between agents and between fields: “[t]he field is the locus of relations of force – and not only of meaning – and of struggles aimed at transforming it, and therefore of endless change”.²² One of the fundamental oppositions structuring the field is an inter-generational struggle between the old and the new artistic producers. Unlike the Naturalists, a group of male writers who feature as an example in Bourdieu’s study, New Women writers’ relationship to cultural legitimacy, and to their foremothers, is more complex than a patriarchal model of challenging the law of the father. Theirs cannot be seen as a challenge in the same terms because, by their gender, they did not belong to a literary tradition which was theirs to renounce and overturn; the notion of collectivism informing feminist identity in the nineteenth century meant that New Woman writers did not necessarily see their work as competing against previous female generations. This structural element, central to the working of the history of the field, presents problems of overdetermination for the question of agency: could New Woman writers ever pose a significant challenge to the prevailing orthodoxy if they did not have a history of the field? However, in the way in which their principles of legitimacy cast them in the role of harbingers of a moral age and their reshaping of the novel for polemical and didactic purposes, their work did represent a generational shift, not in the sense of male avant-gardism,

but as a challenge to the immoralism and phallocentrism of male-authored fictions.

The naming of the movement is important in consolidating and empowering the producers, thus the New Woman as a sign produced an identity, but not one which was stable. The establishment's simultaneous use of the group name was a recognition of its challenge to prevailing literary culture, and a means of controlling and mastering the debate. The formation of the New Woman during the 1880s saw feminists and anti-feminists writers grouped together despite their political differences:

writers and artists endowed with different, even opposing dispositions can co-exist, for a time at least, in the same positions. The structural constraints inscribed in the field set limits to the free play of dispositions; but there are different ways of playing within these limits [...] the avant-garde positions, bring together for a certain time writers and artists from very different origins, whose interests will sooner or later diverge.²³

Thus, as I discuss in chapter 2, an anti-feminist writer such as Grant Allen, writing on the woman question in his novels, can exist in the same position, by being published in the same restricted field, by the same small publishers, as others writing feminist fictions. McDonald identifies two rival extreme groups in the field as the “purists” and the “profiteers”. These values can coexist in the work of the same writer or differ within a group of producers: “few agents are ever exclusively committed to a single position in the field”.²⁴ These opposed

groupings offer a useful way of thinking about a variety of positions in between these which combine these perspectives, such as that of Grant Allen, who wrote for a living, and combined polemicism in his career with a bid for a cultural capital based on his scientific knowledge.

Outline of thesis

My focus on women's newspapers enables me to trace debates within the community of New Woman readers, rather than in the popular press whose satirical media representations of the New Woman critics have made the subject of previous study (Marks 1990, Brake 1994, Tusan 1997). The study of the feminist periodicals in chapter 1 will concentrate on locating the New Woman in cultural and historical contexts, focusing on the ways in which "health" and "hygiene" organise concerns about cultural and national reform and progress, and feature as lifestyle issues in a consumer culture. The centrality of hereditarian discourses to feminist debate, especially as they relate to the eugenicist goals invested in maternity, and their various presentations and contestations in the pages of *Shafes*, *The Woman's Signal*, *The Woman's Penny Paper* and *Womanhood* are discussed. In particular, situating an emerging feminist literary criticism in the reviewing of New Woman fiction in relation to discourses of "hygiene", and consideration of the way in which their treatment of sexuality placed women writers in relation to the Decadent and other forces in the literary field, will establish the varied reception of New Woman fiction by its feminist readers.

In chapter 2, I examine the prose of Grant Allen and the ways in which science functions as cultural capital for this author, especially in his short, sensational stories; his sensitivity to the commercial and cultural possibilities of interdisciplinarity, self-conscious engagement with literary value and with the woman's movement makes his work particularly apposite to revealing the dynamics between publishing fields. Chris Willis has recently commented upon the differences between "polemic New Woman fiction" and commercial New Woman fiction in which the marketable New Woman did not necessarily express the values of feminists, and this chapter explores this distinction in discussion of Grant Allen's presentation of eugenic maternities in *A Splendid Sin* (1896) and *The Woman Who Did* (1895). Allen capitalised on the topicality and popularity of New Woman fiction, and adapted this trope to his own ends; as a male author and anti-feminist, I do not consider Allen to be a New Woman writer, but the extent of his engagement with this figure makes his work particularly apposite to a discussion of the field. Rita Felski's illuminating study of modernity and femininity and Andreas Huyssen's work on mass culture and woman²⁵ inform how this "commercial" male writer's presentation of his work may be viewed in the context of the association of women's writing, the purpose novel, and popular culture.

Although not a New Woman, Vernon Lee's grouping amongst New Woman writers will, in terms of her cultural identity and position in the literary market, be instructive in examining how her professionalism and avowed "learnedness", evident from her publication in "highbrow" journals, determine an altogether different position-taking from the politicised writings of her New

Woman contemporaries. Her aesthetical and ethical concerns with “the beautiful” are based on both Paterian and feminist perspectives, and are engaged in a dialogue with decadence and aestheticism. Chapter 3 discusses the differences between her presentation of evolutionary psychology in her theoretical and literary essays, and her short stories, and the relation between beauty and fitness in this fantastic fiction.

Chapter 4 examines the dialectics between New Woman poetry and science. Could women poets be considered New Women when their work was governed by style and form, rather than politics? Such feminist poetry articulated sexual and social politics in a polemical way through the rhythms of their verse, blatant themes and satirical humour. The modern woman’s engagement with contemporary science was a predominant theme in such verses as ‘The Woman of Today’: “You may see her quick eye kindle/With a bright and vivid flame/At the mention of a Tyndall/ Or a Huxley’s potent name”;²⁶ but was she kindling with anger or enthusiasm? I consider how poets, Kendall and Naden took evolutionary science as their theme, and how, with the use of humour in particular, they critiqued hegemonic notions of progress and woman’s proper role. Poetry was an especially highly contested site for female intellectual literary production, despite, or perhaps because, women poets were becoming increasingly prominent – even notorious – in the 1890s.²⁷ This chapter also exposes conservative reaction to modern women poets. It focuses on the deaths of Amy Levy and Constance Naden as discursive events as they were produced through biological paradigms of degeneration and a body/mind economy. The protestation of scientific and

other commentators using the rhetoric of degeneration betrays the significant impact that these feminist thinkers were having upon the culture.

Popular novels which engage with feminism by Victoria Cross and “Iota” are informed by sex and “race” ideologies of empire in their construction of old and new femininities. Chapter 5, on empire and motherhood, considers how the colonial space was important in consolidating Englishness, and how both writers deploy the concept of empire so as to address anxieties about the degeneration of identities in the metropole. “Iota” negotiates the New Woman; in the texts *A Yellow Aster* (1894) and *A Comedy in Spasms* (1895) she aims to reinstate the traditional role of maternity as the civic duty of the “womanly woman” within marriage, and oppose maternity to intellectualism. The construction of imperial subjectivities in Cross’s *Anna Lombard* (1901) and *The Woman Who Didn’t* (1895) put concepts of purity and sexual morality into question, forcing us to reappraise who the New Woman and New Man might be. Literary and cultural representation of infanticide in the nineteenth century informs a close reading of Cross’s turn-of-the-century eugenicist tale of colonial India, *Anna Lombard*.

Chapter 6, on childhood studies, examines two feminist writers’ representations of childhood in the light of recent developments in evolutionary psychology of the study of child and its relation to the scientific theorisation of the “genius”. Both Sarah Grand in *The Beth Book* (1897) and Alice Meynell in *The Children* (1896) bring to bear evolutionary perspectives on the child to express pedagogical concerns. Grand’s eugenics promote the girl genius for a female future, whilst Meynell’s intellectual essays – which enjoy the “high”

cultural status of their restricted production – balance writing as a mother and representing the child as an object of study.

The identity of “genius”, one which takes on significant proportions in scientific and cultural enquiry at the fin de siècle, is revisited in the last chapter. Here, it is discussed in terms of the problems and possibilities it offered to Sarah Grand and Mona Caird for challenging the dominant claim that there are no “women of genius”, and claiming cultural legitimacy for their novels, an endeavour common to many New Woman writers. There is a particular focus here on the different ways in which both authors’ representation of genius, the language and metaphors they use, are informed by cultural constructions of “race” and its relationship to a national literature. If this thesis traces conflicting ideological objectives and instability in the New Woman’s uses of evolutionary narratives, it also finds that female authors succeeded in wresting powerful scientific discourses from the male establishment, developing and appropriating them for effective literary expression of feminist self-identities and beliefs.

¹ Annie Sophie (Vivian) Cory used both spellings of her pseudonym: I refer to Cross from hereafter.

² Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First Wave Feminism* (London: Macmillan, 2000): 9.

³ Jane Eldridge Miller, *Rebel Women: Modernism, Feminism and the Edwardian Novel* (London: Virago, 1994):18.

⁴ Rita S. Kranidis, *Subversive Discourse: The Cultural Production of Late Victorian Feminist Novels* (London: Macmillan, 1995): 63.

⁵ Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late Victorian England* (London: University Press of Virginia, 2000): 14.

⁶ Ibid: 7.

⁷ The recent special issue in *Victorian Poetry* (2000) on turn-of-the-century woman poets goes some way toward addressing this tendency. Robinson, Bonnie J. (ed.) 'Women Writers 1890-1918' *Victorian Poetry* no.1 (Spring 2000).

⁸ Kranidis, *Subversive Discourse*: 97.

⁹ I find the use of this term critically inadequate when it can be used refer to an undifferentiated group of ideological beliefs, as simply "a theory of human nature". Social Darwinism also implies a separation of science from the social, whereas Darwin's theories, especially in *The Descent of Man*, were always embedded in a social context.

¹⁰ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997):28.

¹¹ Ibid: 28.

¹² Lyn Pykett, *Engendering Fictions: The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1995).

¹³ For discussion of the relationship of the New Woman to imperialism, see chapter 3 of Sally Ledger's *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997). Angelique Richardson examines the relationship of the New Woman to eugenics in *The Eugenisation of Love: Darwin, Galton and Late Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Heredity and Eugenics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

¹⁴ *Woman's Signal* 3:65 (28 March 1895).

¹⁵ Ann Heilmann argues that the term "New Woman" was capitalized as early as 1865 in the *Westminster Review* about the heroines of the new sensation novels. See Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First Wave Feminism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000): 22.

¹⁶ See Ellen Jordan, 'The Christening of the New Woman: May 1894' *Victorian Newsletter* 48 (Spring 1983): . Michelle Elizabeth Tusan, 'Inventing the New Woman: Print Culture and Identity Politics During the Fin-de-Siècle' *Victorian Periodicals Review* 31:2 (Summer 1998): 169-82.

¹⁷ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide Modernism: Mass Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Macmillan, 1986):47.

¹⁸ Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, *The Evolution of Sex* (1889) London: Walter Scott, 1901: 286.

¹⁹ August Weismann, *Essays upon Heredity and Kindred Biological Problems*. Eds. Edward B. Poulton, Selmar Schonland, and Arthur E. Shipley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1889).

²⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1983): 62.

²¹ Peter D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997):12.

²² Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992): 103.

²³ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*: 66.

²⁴ Peter D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice*: 14.

²⁵ See Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Macmillan, 1986) and Rita Felski *The Gender of Modernity* (London: Harvard University Press, 1995).

²⁶ 'The Woman of Today' by T. Malcolm Watson. *St James Gazette* (11 Nov.1889), reprinted in *Womanhood* 3:14 (Jan 1900).

²⁷ Talia Schaffer remarks that the 1890s was also a turbulent decade for female poets, see Schaffer *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes*: 173.

Chapter 1

The New Woman invasion: discourses of hygiene and health in the feminist periodicals.

The women's political press during the 1880s and '90s provided a public arena in which a community of women readers and writers could debate and share ideas. It was characterised by feminists' investigations into, and contestations of, one another's ethical and cultural values about the most pertinent and controversial issues for women. The intertextuality of these periodicals' political writing, sometimes reproduced from other periodicals and publications, and sites such as women's clubs, informed this ideological diversity. The energy of women's commitment to these causes created an alternative field for topical discussion to the ones formed not only by the male mainstream press, such as the *New Review* or *Saturday Review*, but to other progressive periodicals. As Michelle Elizabeth Tusan (1998) has argued, the feminist periodicals were produced as a public popular forum in which feminists could contest and combat the negative images of the New Woman constructed in the mainstream press.¹ Although the papers' overall concern was for female emancipation, definitions of emancipation took a variety of ideological forms. Amongst different groups and classes of women methods for attaining their feminist goals were radically different.

This chapter will consider the rubric of "hygiene" in women's journals, and explore a cluster of concerns which it organises and informs, the reforms to marriage and sexual relations, women's health, and the criticism of fiction. Concentrating on the extent to which eugenicist themes and narratives in New Woman novels met recognition and acceptance, the

treatment of such literature in *Shafts* and the *Woman's Signal*, the critical role of the women's papers in guiding their readers and developing feminist literary criticism will be examined.

One of the most radical political papers promoting women's causes during the 1890s was *Shafts* (1892-1900) which at one stage of its production identified itself as "a Paper for Women and the Working Classes"; published initially as a penny weekly, it became a monthly in 1893 and then a quarterly in 1897, and finished as a bi-monthly in October 1899. It was edited by Margaret Shurmer Sibthorp (1851?-1915) who was a member of the Theosophical Society from 1891 for three years, and a founder member of the Theosophical League of Isis.² *Shafts* debated subjects including vegetarianism, cruelty to animals, workers' conditions and theosophy, and it dealt very summarily with traditional feminine pursuits and interests in home and family. As one reader remarked, "I am so glad to get SHAFTS every month, it is like a dear friend already. I like it altogether but specially because it does not lower its standard by inserting articles on fashion, household receipts &c; which is done by almost every other woman's paper, political or social."³

Somewhat less radical and satirical than *Shafts* was *The Woman's Signal* (1894 – 1899), which was initially dominated by issues of temperance and suffrage, and was edited by Lady Isabelle Henry Somerset (1851-1921) and Annie E. Holdsworth (d.1910 ?)⁴ The paper had two previous incarnations, as *The Woman's Penny Paper* (1888-1891) and *The Woman's Herald* (1891-1893). Rosemary T. Van Arsdell in a study of the *Woman's Signal* has, with brief reference to these papers, characterised the aim of the *Woman's Penny Paper* (WPP) as "largely to promote the cause of temperance" and described the *Woman's Herald* (WH) as being "mainly concerned with female suffrage", both are described as carrying "a little literature for its lightness and diversion".⁵ Whilst I agree that much of the papers' coverage was often dedicated to these issues, I aim to give a more detailed analysis of the other

interests and aims of the papers by focusing on a neglected area of scholarship in this field: their coverage of the Woman Question in relation to scientific discourses, particularly in the context of empire and “race”.

Van Arsdel records how the *Woman's Signal* declared itself to be “flashing its light from humanity’s capital”, London, that imperial centre and “heart of the world”, but she does not register any of the ideological implications of this construction of the metropole which inform the paper’s treatment of the relation of feminism to the Empire. The emblematic cameo inside the cover page of *Woman's Signal* portrays a divine image of maternity, a Madonna with child, embellished with the legend: “ the woman’s movement means organised mother love”. A seemingly unsubversive assimilation of the modern femininity into traditional, religious iconography and domestic role,⁶ this motto nonetheless expressed some of the deepest convictions of many feminists that their power for reform lay in an actual as well as symbolic maternal identity and role. As Sally Ledger (1997) has observed in relation to the New Woman’s involvement with imperialism, the *Woman's Signal* was one feminist organ which made an implicit connection between sexual purity and the defence of empire to its readers.⁷ We will see below how this configuration of “mother love” allied women with the politics of empire.

In 1895, with sales of the *Woman's Signal* dropping, the editorship was assumed by Florence Fenwick Miller. Her editorial role changed the fortunes of the paper with style and content significantly overhauled. Circulation figures rose: in 1898 she claimed that “[i]n one year, more than 300,000 Signals go broadcast, every one of the 52 numbers containing material to serve for the education of fresh minds on the Woman’s cause”.⁸ This leading female journalist had a good feel for the field; she was a published author, writer for the *Illustrated London News* and other London daily papers, a columnist and freelance periodical

contributor, as well as editor of *Outward Bound*, a journal for the colonies.⁹ In a move away from its predominately temperance content and high moral tone, Miller modified the most stridently political content of the paper by including short stories, fashion illustrations (about whose narrow-waisted women she received complaints), menus, gardening and hints on etiquette. Writing about the fortunes of the *Signal*, Van Arsdell identifies the paper's strong temperance tone and charts the changes which Fenwick Miller introduced during her editorship, including her strong support for female suffrage. Circulation figures for these papers are rarely given by the editors, but if the success of the two papers, the *Signal* and *Shafts* can be at all measured in terms of their longevity, then *Shafts* may have had a more loyal or greater readership – and zealous editor – than did the *Signal*.

The content of the *Woman's Signal* and *Shafts* is not subjected to the binarisation of the commercial and the artistic characteristic of the aesthetic ideology of more “literary” and upper-class publications such as the *Woman's World* in which the advertising is discreetly relegated to pages at the back of the magazine. Advertising, which must have contributed significantly to the financing of the paper, features quite prominently. The advertising is part of the journal's culture and values in a different way from more mainstream women's papers, for the readers identity as consumer is significantly related to their political identity expressed in a lifestyle involving, for example, vegetarianism and rational dress. Pages of adverts solely for political pamphlets and publications offering legal advice suggest a New Woman consumer with varied political and sociological interests. The advertising pages at the back of the journal do proffer conventional cosmetic items (hair oils and dressings, “Ladies friend” combs, handkerchiefs), as well as goods and services for the more “progressive” consumer: vegetarian food (fruit and nuts, wholefood grocers), rational dress (divided skirts, knitted corsets, hygienic hats) and such educational establishments as the Scottish St. Georges

Training College of Women Teachers, and small personal ads offer “education for young or delicate girls: home tuition”. This panoply of goods and services from the local and private to a national trade context manage the demands of a woman consumer who has been produced through the ideological and cultural determinants of the intercourse between the modern health and woman’s movements. A culture of consumption in this period had begun to inform new modes of subjectivity for women, of which the healthy New Woman was one.

Laurel Brake suggests of the periodical press in the late nineteenth century that “the illusion of a characteristic ‘identity’ (whether eclectic or singular) is one of the constitutive conditions of newspapers and periodicals as commodities competing in the market-place and as forms of cultural production”.¹⁰ *Shafts*’ “eclectic” character, especially in the early years, was constituted through writing by a combination of established, less well-known and anonymous figures from a variety of feminist positions, and by the contributions of its equally diverse readers. It offered itself in the market-place as a real alternative to the traditional content of women’s papers, and although it expressed solidarity with workers, professed no political allegiance. These papers did not belong in the same literary field as the large intellectual and literary journals such as the *New Review*, *Fortnightly Review* or *Blackwoods Magazine*, which although they expressed liberal views and interest in the changes in middleclass women’s status, had higher circulation amongst a wider readership.

It is not always possible to identify the writers in these periodicals. Whilst some well known figures were featured, such as Frances Power Cobbe, Margaret Macmillan and Mrs Ormiston Chant, others were anonymous, sometimes deploying simply initials or mythic designations and other pseudonymous identities expressing allegiance to the New Woman. Journalists on the staff and regular contributors to *Shafts* often wrote under more than one name, either to anonymously explore various critical perspectives, or to disguise any editorial

hegemony. The issues involved in the anonymity-signature debate in journalism, which continued until the end of the century – the practices of professionalism, of eliminating puffery – cannot easily be applied to this context for it would presuppose a level and form of critical reviewing which did not take place in these papers. Clearly, whilst a hierarchical dimension existed which structured the standing of women writers in the woman's movement, as it did the contributors of the mainstream heavy-weight journals, there are different implications for the feminist paper which sought to consolidate an active community through identity politics. Anonymity in this context perhaps fostered equality through the effect of many diverse voices contributing to common political goals in a common context.

Whilst there were ongoing debates about professionalism in journalism in the mainstream press, the feminist papers were especially interested in the discussion and promotion of women's professionalisation in journalism as a prominent role for the New Woman, and of course their profiling in this press acted as an exemplar for professionalism for women in other spheres. Women had worked in journalism throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century, for example, George Eliot, Harriet Martineau and Margaret Oliphant; women's entry into the profession became greater, and more visibly feminine and feminist during the 1890s when women sought to confirm their professional status, with the Society of Women Journalists being established in 1895.¹¹ As well as receiving hostility from their male colleagues, the ability of women to persevere and succeed in the "brain-work" demanded by such a profession was doubted by women too. The Tory, Frances Power Cobbe in the *Woman's Penny Paper* in an article on 'Journalism as a Profession of Women' of 1888, felt that even though it would be for "the good of the community at large, – which would be advanced by a larger infusion of womanly conscientiousness, tenderness and purity of feeling", nevertheless claimed that "[f]ew women possess the steady health and equable brain

power which can enable them to perform the serious mental labour of original composition on a fresh subject everyday (or let us say, every alternate day), week in week out, through the greater part of the year.”¹² Such a view of female professionalism, hedged in by concessions to patriarchal wisdom was not expressed by most women in the field. An interview with Walter Besant, founder of the Society of Authors, was featured in the *Signal* in 1894 on the subject of his series ‘All Sorts and Conditions of Men’ which had appeared in five major newspapers. The concurrent series which ran in the *Signal*, ‘All Sorts and Conditions of – Women’ incorporated discussion of Besant’s views by some notable Victorians. Fenwick Miller defended women journalists – one of the targets of Besant’s misogynist views – refuted his claim that in the New Journalism “the entry of women is proving most disastrous because they take half the pay of men”,¹³ and challenged him to prove it. She argued that women commanded as high a price as their male colleagues and had never to her knowledge, been employed in preference to a man for this reason.

William Thomas Stead, editor of the liberal paper the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and active publicist on women’s issues highlighted women’s need of training and education to prepare their entry into a career in political journalism; in the *Review of Reviews* Stead had regretted the dearth of women journalists and offered his women readers a scholarship with which to expand their intellectual and professional horizons.¹⁴ This prize was announced as a news item in the *Woman’s Penny Paper* during 1890;¹⁵ Stead had close connections with *Shafts*, he had expressed his support of women journalists by making his offices available to Margaret Shurmer Sibthorp in order to conduct lectures.¹⁶ But whatever their actual numbers, women’s role in the expansion of the press was a significant aspect in the gendering of modernity in patriarchal and feminist rhetoric alike. The female journalist was in many ways a

quintessential figure of cultural modernity, and moreover her professionalisation acted an exemplar for the professionalisation of women in other spheres.

Evelyn March Phillips in an article in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1894 entitled ‘Women’s Newspapers’, examines the rise of the woman’s newspaper and the contribution of women journalists to the field. March-Phillips moves from the notion of New Woman as textual construct in the satirical cartoon of the male, mainstream press, to her existence as a real person as a reader and consumer:

[t]he career, the claims, the character of her whom *Punch*, with a lapse from his habitual gallantry, styles “the irrepressible she”, meet us at every turn in modern life, and perhaps the multiplication and development of newspapers devoted to her special interests is not the least significant token of her vitality.¹⁷

She attributes the unaccredited work and innovation in newspaper journalism to women, not only for having done the hard graft, which she regrets male editors so often get the credit for, but of giving papers new interest and freshness. The pejorative associations made with the “new” by cultural critics – such as Matthew Arnold in his criticism of the New Journalism as a press for the mass market¹⁸ – are eschewed for a validation of the “modern”, with which “woman” is indissolubly linked: “[t]he woman journalist to whom, cry her down as it may, the press of today owes much of its brightness and life, has been in great measure, created by writing on subjects she understands, in journals for her own sex.”¹⁹ The region of women’s papers is seen as an essentially supportive ground for women to start writing, not only in its own right, but as one from which female writers can also work on the general papers.

Although it gives rise to concern over standards for March-Phillipps, the separatism in the market is a significant indicator of the growth of the woman's movement:

the diverse subjects with which she is now specially connected in this country, demand a fuller treatment than the ordinary paper will give them. For instance, when the Women Workers Conference takes place in the autumn, an event of deep interest to hundreds, if not thousands of women, the general papers scarcely touch upon it.²⁰

Despite her enthusiasm for the coverage of New Woman pursuits (sports, travel, trades and professions, university degrees awarded), March-Phillipps is disapproving of the political feminist papers for failing to situate themselves in the wider periodicals field:

publications which eliminate the frivolous and the homely, and exist for the advancement of a "cause", are read by suffragists and teetotallers, but are as Greek and Hebrew to the general public. Nor do they pay because by the nature of their being, they fail to attract the indispensable advertiser.²¹

Her castigation of the narrow aestheticist interest in modern interiors, fashion, society styles and beauty in many women's magazines, and her criticisms more generally, serve to present the new women's paper to the reader as distanced from the frivolities of the aristocracy, and instead disciplines girls in the lower and middle-classes with practical knowledge, widening and educating their minds. March-Phillips had undertaken investigations into, and expressed support for, women's trade-unions;²² here she highlighted the value of these papers for their role in enabling the New Girl to find employment:

[n]o section is more really important than that which deals with women's employment, giving descriptions, suggestions, advice, and it is to be hoped real pains will be taken to make it as comprehensive and trustworthy as possible. We cannot overestimate the value to a girl who contemplates a self-supporting career, but may be living in the provinces, with no friend to apply to, and no money to spend on pursuing researches, of being able to obtain experienced opinion, to gauge to some extent the openings available and the conditions of success.²³

The reality was that, for example, *Shafts* – as one such publication advancing the “cause” of women's emancipation – naturally took an interest in promoting the employment of women. As I have suggested in relation to the field of journalism, careers had a central role in the paper, from its inspirational interviews with high profile women in public life and elsewhere in the women's movement, through to its articles and vacancies advertised for work and training. Contradictions characterise this report; in her aim to demonstrate women's professionalism, March-Phillips' text exhibits the strain of trying to reconcile feminist concerns with the values of the male dominated establishment periodicals market.

Hygiene and the New Woman

One of the most significant and pervasive ideas in the women's movement associated with scientific progress was the multivalent term of “hygiene”; from the shared concerns for temperance and vegetarianism of the radical paper, the *Hygienic Adviser* which sported an illustration of the goddess Hygeia on its cover,²⁴ to the establishment of “hygienic homes” where young women were trained in the latest methods of domestic cleaning and food

preparation, this signifier was attached to a whole slew of health practices and their attendant anxieties and aims for producing a better nation. The full page advertisements with engravings illustrating in detail the equipment inside modern gymnasiums conducted on “strict Hygienic principles”,²⁵ carried in *Shafts* signify the interest of feminism in the advances in health and fitness education for women. The first colleges in Britain intended for training educated women as “Teachers of Scientific Physical Education” are advertised among the pages of this periodical. The Hampstead Gymnasium College is advertised prominently, a college of physical education which, Sheila Fletcher in her history of women’s physical education has noted, was established as a result of the appointment by the London Board School of Martina Bergman (later Bergman-Österberg) to teach Swedish gymnastics in 1881.²⁶

As well as these private gyms and “homes”, public spaces for recreational exercise were also being demanded by female tax-payers who saw their taxes spent on football and cricket pitches reserved for men only. Increased health and fitness for women were linked to greater individual freedom in leisure and work pursuits, and, as anti-feminists perceived with disapproval, possibilities of activities and pleasures autonomous and independent from the domestic sphere.²⁷ Like the gymnastics of Thomas Hardy’s modern woman, Paula Power, in *A Laodicean* (1881), such physical training for women was associated with an emancipated modernity. However, women’s training in modern health and sanitation practices, such as that offered by “Miss Anstey’s Hygienic Home for Girls”,²⁸ where young women would be trained in exercise, how to dress hygienically, and in the skills of “scientific cookery” and cleaning, also centred on traditional roles.

Innovations in physical exercise training were intimately connected with eugenicist ideals, practices and apparatus. The founder of gymnasiums for girls in England based on the

Swedish Ling system, Madame Bergman-Österberg, interviewed in the *Woman's Penny Paper*, explicitly presented her aim as being to develop girls' physiques to enable them to become better – because fitter – mothers for the race. She insisted that “the strength of the girl, as potential mother, must be cultivated or the race will be feeble; we see that it is feeble from the neglect of this in the past”.²⁹ The zealous advocacy of such improvements in female health was couched in terms of imperialistic powers; the nation should invest in the capital of the female body to produce a better race. Her emancipatory rhetoric firmly conjoined feminism with evolutionism; Bergman-Österberg saw her Physical Training College as the means to “assist in the production of a nobler race, a race, the records of which shall hold so many noble women that long suppression shall be forgotten as a tale that is told.”³⁰ Sheila Fletcher records that Bergman-Österberg's training college was implicated in early eugenicist research in collaboration with Francis Galton. The records to which she refers as having historical and anthropological significance would be literally created from the statistics collated by her students in the anthropometric laboratories of Galton in London.³¹

With the establishment of her own training college, the entrepreneurial Bergman-Österberg was only interested in the training of the middle and upper-classes as the women who would take the race forwards, but as one reader in the correspondence column on women's sport in the *Woman's Penny Paper* remarked: “if both sexes are to be mere muscle, we shall be no better and not so good as the beasts that are said to perish. Physique is not everything, and be it noted the very classes which need this training, the girls of the poor, do not get it.”³² This reader, also sceptical of the contemporary imperial and militaristic discourse of fitness, and the threat it posed to a civilised intellectual culture registered her pacifist concerns over the eugenic agenda for women's physical fitness:

[h]ow can people have the time, the energy and the enthusiasm for intellectual pursuits if they are always playing cricket, or tennis or any other game of skill or chance? Perhaps the future of Great Britain (unless we get Imperial Federation) may require that we should become a nation of soldiers, and our male population being small, women may be compelled to help man in fighting; but [...] I prefer to look forward to some chance that may oblige Europe to lessen her armies and to live in real unarmed peace. This being my dream, I do not feel such enthusiasm in the cultivation of muscle as some of my friends, and I prefer to think of mankind as beings possessed of cultivated brains.³³

Emphasis on women's fitness was not welcomed here, not because of its supposed masculinising effect – as some opponents of the New Woman argued – but for the role it was deemed to play in specifically military and imperialistic rhetoric.

Patricia Marks in her book on the representation of the New Woman in the periodicals, comments on the relationship between eugenicism and hygiene. She suggests of the eugenic discourses pervading the press:

[s]uch proposals reflect a generalised scientific cast of mind that showed itself in a variety of ways – in the call for “hygienic” marriages, for instance, and for women's athletics and dress reform. Perhaps one of the most important factors in the women's movement was just this increasingly modern idea about fitness for marriage and propagation, because it helped to interpret the Victorian conception of female beauty in a more realistic light.³⁴

As Marks suggests, many practices relating to “health” became subsumed under the terms “hygiene” and “fitness”, and such discourses framed feminist appeals for women's

participation in sports with a drive toward enabling and promoting women's physical well-being, and the independence and opportunity for the formation of female communities that sports provided. Marks' presentation of eugenics as an integral part of the woman's movement is accurate, but her evaluation of it is more problematic: that opposition to Victorian ideals of feminine beauty were driven by eugenic concerns for reproductive fitness could hardly be welcomed as liberating and "realistic". That eugenic proposals for reproduction were in some way "pragmatic" is a troubling suggestion; Marks' evaluation glides over feminists' investment in eugenics evading its implications by focusing on the "beneficial" outcomes which accompanied this modern aesthetic of female beauty.

This chapter will trace this diffuse signifier, "hygiene", in its various manifestations in the women's periodicals and shows it to operate in a number of ways and contexts; in the health and sanitation movement; in concerns over sexual relations between men and women in and out of marriage in relation to the development of eugenic beliefs, and its impact on discourses of the New Woman novel.

Norman Brady (1978) has carried out some useful research into the relationship between two groups of contributors to *Shafts*, whom he characterises as the "female chauvinists", such as M. S. Sibthorp, Edith Ward and E. L. Massingberd, and the "sexual utopians" – George Bedborough, Geoffrey Mortimer and "Sagittarius" – male writers who would form and write *The Adult, the Journal of Sex* (1897-99) a paper linked to their work in the Legitimation League. Brady's study traces the "gradual emergence from an initially vague and ill-defined relationship, of two opposed ideologies, which underwent continuous refinement as the 1890s progressed."³⁵ Brady finds what he designates "progressive" and "counter-culture" stances to be a "strange dichotomy within the pages of the same journal";³⁶ in his analysis social-purity feminist interests and solutions to social problems are contrasted to those of the "sexual

utopians". Brady's somewhat Whiggish methodology leads him to characterise these groups as backward and forward-looking respectively, particularly in respect to their approaches to sexuality which he designates "repressive" and "libertarian, almost revolutionary", respectively.³⁷ This polarisation produced along gender lines is partly sustained by the elision of the way in which both groups, and sexes, shared eugenicist understandings of degeneration and goals in fitness. Rather than seeing the nature of *Shafts*' approach, in particular the language and rhetoric, as posing a methodological problem, in that it is obfuscatory of its aims or any "precise message"; I suggest that the nature of this material makes it productive to consider the ambiguity which arises from the ways in which the texts inhabit a cross-current of social theories which continued to resolve themselves along fractured trajectories.

From its launch, *Shafts* is self-consciously identified with issues in modern science. The title and front cover depict a mythic female figure resembling Artemis, shooting arrows of light, clearly deploying a symbol of enlightenment with which to signify the journal's reformist editorial ethos, expressed in the initial tagline, "Light comes to those who dare to think". The origin of the title can also be found to reside in the journal's exploration of contemporary scientific and secularised ideas about the transmission of energy, explored in one of its first leading articles. In the first number of *Shafts*, an article by Edith Ward, a prominent contributor to the paper and author of theosophical works,³⁸ exemplifies the way in which *Shafts*' progressive identity was characterised by the assimilation of modern thought in science with the mystical and theosophic.³⁹ Janet Oppenheim, in her study of spiritualism and occult sciences, has suggested that the claims to scientificity in theosophy's grounds and methods made by the founder, Madam Blavatsky, were integral to the movement's and its followers' claims to legitimacy.⁴⁰ Similarly, Rita Felski has noted that

while rejecting many of the tenets of Western rationalism, the religious cults of the fin de siècle frequently appealed to the language of science to legitimate their own doctrines [...] references to atoms, ectoplasm, electromagnetism, and various other forces and substances were used to substantiate the language of faith and revelation.⁴¹

Edith Ward points out to the new readership of *Shafts* that “the design upon its outer page should be emblematic of a grand and all pervading truth”;⁴² the work of this “new messenger” will be to carry “‘Shafts of Thought’ that will in turn give rise to myriad germs of purity and good intent”.⁴³ The writer opens by extolling the discoveries of science in the nineteenth century, merging the names of the chemist and physicist, William Crookes, F.R.S (who converted to spiritualism to communicate with his dead wife), Professors Zollner and Lodge, and of the American inventor of the telegraph, Thomas Edison, whose experiments and hypotheses “all tend to show that we stand upon the verge of new and wonderful discoveries in that mysterious medium, for want of a better title, our scientific teachers term The Ether.”

44

Previously imagined as an invisible world connoting the heavens, “the ether” had been associated with a religious discourse in the earlier part of the century. Gillian Beer suggests that in the later nineteenth century the discoveries in physics of thermodynamic laws and new homologies being made between sound and sight popularised in publications and public demonstrations meant that “(v)ision, was, in a quite new way, subordinate to the invisible”.⁴⁵ The invisible was understood as the medium of the ether, through which many forces of nature – energy waves of sound and light – passed, and thus “the ‘invisible’ was becoming increasingly secularised”.⁴⁶ Spiritualism’s interest in material emanations of contact made with the unseen spirit world was of course a manifestation of this secularisation. Ward

suggested that these discoveries of the properties of the ether, by revealing unseen processes can also give us indications of wonderful forces and power in the human mind as yet unrealised or unexploited, for example as electricity had been. She cites the investigations at the Salpêtrière into “the mysteries of hypnotism, the keen interest which is being taken in the phenomena of clairvoyance, of telepathy and double consciousness”,⁴⁷ and takes these as evidence of a spiritual dimension of psychic powers in man. Ward outlines a doctrine of thought–creative power in conjunction with the “germ theory of which we now hear so much”⁴⁸ – which refers to charged particles – and the role of *Shafts* and its readers within this doctrine. She argues that:

[e]very human soul is constantly engaged in creating and throwing off germs of thought, good or bad, exactly as germs are being created and thrown off by the physics system, these traverse the ether as microbes traverse the atmosphere, and fall upon the soil of other minds as physical germs upon the body [...] the thought germs are fructified or sterilised according as their character, good or bad, meet with what is receptive to their influence.⁴⁹

Thus, in this philanthropic strategy the health of the social body is sustained through the thoughts and wishes of “purity and good intent” which confer moral or spiritual enlightenment upon others. When Ward claims that “no desire for good is lost in the economy of the universe”,⁵⁰ such reference to the cosmos seems to point toward the latter discoveries in physics of the laws of thermodynamics which proposed the interdependence of relationships of all forms of energy.

But as well as the language of physics, discourses of health and hygiene are clearly abroad here in the analogies of thoughts and prayers as “germs” and the contamination of

society by good or bad moralities. The germ theory is used as a means of promoting a social conscience and responsibility created by a shared atmosphere; whether in the slum or the manor, all are “brother or sister” in the democratising web of the ether. The ether, for Ward, is an equalising medium in which both the “submerged tenth” of “Darkest England” and “respectability” are at once subject to the germs which traverse it, in turn creating a demand for a moral responsibility for having created this “plague spot in our midst”.⁵¹

Ward advises that across the ether, even the invalid reader of *Shafts*, incapacitated for active philanthropic work, and those struggling with material cares who “doubt they have either power or time to engage in work for the world’s good”, can “use” this medium to effect change; the passive act of reading can have practical results, by sending “forth germs of helpful vigour to men and women engaged in active work”.⁵² In criticism which privileges the journalism of the male writers on *Shafts*, Brady sees the “feminine” and “mystic” prose of writers on *Shafts*, such as Ward, as inconsistent in style and critical approach. His complaint that “not only is it typical of a vague and incoherent style of expression, but it reflects the complete lack of a maturing argument”⁵³ is founded on an incorrect division of gendered thought and expression in late-nineteenth-century scientific and spiritual enquiry. The notion of the “doctrine of thought-creative power” as one which expresses the idea of the scientific, objective efficacy of prayer, was a subject into which eminent scientists such as Alfred Russel Wallace in *Miracles and Modern Spiritualism* (1875), Francis Galton in *Enquiries into Human Faculty* (1883), and the anthropologist Edward B. Tylor, had made investigation. Both Tylor and Wallace in their private correspondence recommended to Galton, *The Lord’s Dealings with George Müller*⁵⁴ – a work about the philanthropist who established an orphanage in Bristol and the money he received for good works in answer to his prayers. The boundaries for what was and was not legitimate scientific enquiry were consistently under

question, with heterodox and orthodox camps sometimes engaged in dialogue and disagreement. I suggest that the treatment of science in *Shafts* cannot be easily categorised into legitimate, or progressive approaches and my reading takes the journal as a textual whole.

Hygienic Maternity

Women's status in marriage and the problems it generated for sexual health were discussed in light of concerns for national progress. In 1893 *Shafts* generated debates amongst its readers on the moral implications of marriage and maternity for women and "the race" when it ran two articles by Geoffrey Mortimer, the pseudonym of Walter Matthes Gallichan, the prolific writer of over thirty books, including the tellingly entitled, *Chapters on Human Love* (1898), *The Blight of Respectability. An Anatomy of the Disease and a Theory of Curative Treatment* (1897) and *The New Morality* (1902). Mortimer, along with George Bedborough (George Higgs), editor of the *Adult*, contributed many articles on socialism and trade unionism to *Shafts* in its earlier days. In an article entitled, 'Enforced Maternity',⁵⁵ Mortimer criticised the ethics of the marriage law which did not recognise rape by a husband of his wife, explicitly stating that, legally "a wife is bound to permit intercourse whether she chooses it or not",⁵⁶ with the consequence that the law condones the enforced, prolonged periods of childbearing that ensue and licenses the husband who may be "mentally or physically unfitted for the responsibilities of fatherhood".⁵⁷ In calling for greater candour in discussing family planning, he praised the work of Charles Bradlaugh, birth-control advocate. Significantly, Mortimer attributed the decrease in the birth-rate, despite the rise in the number of marriages, to the agency of women, and implied that they were already using contraceptive methods to limit their families despite their subjection to patriarchal laws; a crusading Mortimer enthused: "[t]he remedy is already in the hands of women. It is useless to state that the increase of the

numbers of marriages and the decrease of the birth rate has no significance.”⁵⁸ The advocacy of “scientific checks” – contraceptive devices and practices – to prevent “undue and immoral reproduction”⁵⁹ must, Mortimer vehemently concluded, be made clearly, not in the oblique language of sociologists or experts, but in “plain speech for plain people”.⁶⁰ Although it is for women’s greater happiness and quality of life that he advocated restraints, the social groups whose education in sexual knowledge concern him are “the plain people”⁶¹ or “the masses”, the social classes popularly considered to be producing more unfit citizens.

In the next issue of *Shafts*, in an article entitled, ‘Immoral Marriage’, Mortimer makes a more explicit appeal to eugenic ethics. He cites the work of John Fergus Nisbet, whose book *Marriage and Heredity* (1889)⁶² discussed the dangerous implications of marriages contracted between those with unsound heredity, manifested in congenital diseases, criminal or even intemperate behaviour, and endorsed Nisbet’s hope that “we may assume the society of the future will open its eyes with a view to the establishment of a system of moral as well as physical selection”.⁶³ The immoral marriage for Mortimer is one which does *not take into* consideration the fitness of the parties, and this includes not only whether either partner has venereal disease – the target of social purity campaigners – but also “insanity, drunkenness or vicious propensities of a sort”.⁶⁴ In the view of Mortimer, parents of “Puritanism and sleek respectability” are alike united in their perpetuation of the marriage of convenience which fails to take into consideration the health of the decadent suitor or “dotard” for their unknowing daughter. Leaving open the question of natural versus legal bonds as a basis for future unions, Mortimer predicts that

the suggestion that the domestic evolution of the future will be determined by higher notions of parental responsibility is a hopeful one. At present there are but few evidence

of general consideration of the physiological and moral adaptation of husband and wife; and without this consideration marriage will continue to be based on chance instead of science.⁶⁵

Only with the advent of a eugenic responsibility of reproduction, outside the “matrimonial mart”, will citizens become fully what he terms “nationalised women and men”.⁶⁶ Was Mortimer aiming to bring in the more radical proposition for women’s use of contraception in marriage by the back door in the more legitimate, culturally endorsed establishment of eugenics? Mortimer’s use of the term “science” joins contraception and eugenic aims under the same sign; marriages made by scientific principles will hasten domestic evolution, further augmented by the use of “scientific checks”.

Many social purity feminists advocated chastity in marriage rather than the indulgence of what they called the “animal” instincts. These periodicals evidence the beliefs of both the Theosophy movement and to a greater degree the health movements, that environmental and social conditions had a large part in determining the “fitness” of an individual. The Neo-Lamarckian paradigms of a meliorisable heredity – the inheritance of characteristics acquired during an individual’s life-time, the transmission of effects of environment, learned and lived experiences to offspring – prevailed in the discourse of those reformers acquainted with the dangers of unhygienic living and working conditions and subsequent health problems among the poor. The influence of moral sensibilities during the conditions of conception and pregnancy lent weight to the reforms called for by temperance campaigners in particular.⁶⁷

One reader who opposed the use of birth control but did not wish to throw out the eugenic baby with the bathwater of Mortimer’s immodest and immoral proposals was Matilda M. Blake. Blake, author of a previous article in *Shafts* on ‘The Lady and the Law’,⁶⁸ objects

to Geoffrey Mortimer's expression in 'Enforced Maternity' of "confusion of thought and strange mixed morality", from which he can propose the use of "scientific checks".⁶⁹ Blake draws on such Lamarckian concepts here, urging readers to "remember the marvels of heredity and how the mood of the parents at the moment of generation and their habits of life are inherited and reproduced in the mental equipment of their offspring".⁷⁰ On the premise that the object of marriage is the procreation of children, an unnatural marriage of debauchery and indulgence in the passions could only pass on a dubious morality to the offspring. Moreover this would in fact have anti-eugenic effects upon the future generation, the writer continues, "if the unnatural prostitution of these powers is to be sanctioned in women as well as men it will lead to the double heritage of evil passions and the deterioration of the race as generations go on".⁷¹ To support her argument she draws on the authority of one Dr. Richardson, in an article in *Longman's Magazine* of 1888. Dr. Richardson had argued that the use of "scientific checks" was a symptom of moral degeneration which can only lead to higher infant mortality rates and the deterioration of the race that remains: "[l]imit the numbers of a race, limit growth by the imposition of unnatural laws and the triumph will be the development of a limited population of an abortive type."⁷² The restriction of the family is a goal Blake shares with Mortimer, but she insists that "it must be achieved by continence in marriage; so called 'scientific checks' are destructive to health, often fail in their object besides being morally degrading and leading to race deterioration".⁷³ In a rare editorial intervention, significant in identifying her position on these issues, Sibthorp lends support to the correspondent:

This is a step in the right direction. The population question ought to be discussed in the utmost purity. For the sake of the mother and the children, also for the sake of the father,

families should be restricted; but, as the writer says, it must be a life of self restraint and virtue in the home and out of it which must produce this result. Women must themselves be the controlling power, the arbiter and authority on this point. Such a life would ennoble our women, men and children and bring forth,
 “. . . A nobler race/ In nobler forms enshrined” [Ed.]⁷⁴

Sibthorp's views consolidate the purists' belief in an ennobling chastity with which they sought to advocate freedom from the material, physical degradation of marriages conceived both in principle and often in reality, in the ownership of women's bodies.

The voices of protest against this chaste “angelic” ideal were rare in these papers; but one reader responded to a proposition that “women as a sex are more chaste than men” with what she expressed as the wish to clear cant, stating her belief, which she held was shared by many women doctors, that “so far as the physical part of their nature is concerned, women are neither free from temptation nor is temptation resisted as strenuously as it might be under those social conditions which tried to make virtue consist only in not being found out or under the cover of the marriage vow.”⁷⁵ This writer declares that reformers of modern society should take heed of both medical evidence and common knowledge which would refute this sex essentialism, for “it is the height of un-wisdom to set woman upon an exaggerated pedestal of suppositious virtue whose foundation can be readily shaken”.⁷⁶

Dissenting female voices sought to interrogate purity feminism's dogged refusal to part with the notion of the Victorian angel wife and mother. Another reader calling herself, “A Young Matron”, wrote in response to the ‘Enforced Maternity’ article to identify the problematic parents as amongst the upper-classes. The writer criticises the excessively large families of the upper and middle-classes as the result of their complacent disregard for family

planning. “Mothers” are not presented as a homogenous group, instead this ideal construct is analysed in class and historical terms. Middle-class women, instead of being a “benefit to the race” and the source of civilisation, as current hegemonic thought holds them to be, are “barbarous” she argues, because their profligate breeding depends upon lower-class women as wet-nurses, servants and nursemaids to do the labour of mothering for them. Such women “throw all the labour connected with them on to some unfortunate girls or women whom Providence or to speak more exactly, our capitalistic system has placed at their mercy.”⁷⁷ Her materialist analysis, by deflating the ideal of the mother, questions the social welfare of all women in a strong socialistic voice, which was well represented in *Shafts*.

The notion of chastity within marriage received strong support in the *Signal* and its earlier incarnations as the *Woman's Herald* and *Woman's Penny Paper*. It was an attractive facet of theosophy for many social purists. An article on ‘The True Basis of Marriage’ opens with W.T. Stead in *The Review of Reviews* quoting Annie Besant in *Lucifer*:

by none other road than by that of self-control and self-denial can men and women now set going causes which on their future return to earth life shall build for them bodies and brains of a higher type. [...] Theosophists should sound the note of self-restraint within marriage, and the restriction of the marital relation and the perpetuation of the race.⁷⁸

This, the writer claimed, signalled the “first public recognition in an English periodical of the fundamental basis of morality” which was “sexual intercourse for procreation only”.⁷⁹ The writer looks to America as the nation which had led reform on this issue for the past twenty years, and to the work of “a noble Lady physician” – probably Frances Willard, the well known feminist educationalist active in the States and in Britain. Diminishing the numbers of

the swelling population in poverty and ensuring those few conceived would be “well born”, an American democratic principle of a new nobility on the basis of hereditary moral and social excellence, this strategy of continence would ensure the best perpetuation of the race. In the face of accelerating urban poverty and crime, as depicted in the “mean streets” of the “Jago” in Arthur Morrison’s *A Child of the Jago* (1896), William Booth’s *In Darkest England* (1890) and the investigations of W. T. Stead into child prostitution in the series ‘Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon’,⁸⁰ eugenic anxieties about the multiplication of the “unfit” became attached to class. It was the population of the masses with their hereditary legacies of criminality, sexual incontinence and intemperance who, in the popular imagination, are often associated with the degeneration of the race.

Explicit advocacy of birth control in *Shafts*, from male or female contributors, although present, is rare, and is subject to the social discipline of *Shafts*’ purity discourses through which women’s traditional domestic status was incorporated into a feminist identity of eugenic evolutionary progress. Kate Flint, in *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* addresses the dynamics between readers and the periodical press, including *Shafts* and the *Woman’s Signal* in her discussion of the practices of the female reader in the long nineteenth century. Flint has illustrated the change in the treatment of sex during twenty years in the women’s periodicals by comparing the earlier more conservative organ, *Englishwoman’s Review* published during the 1860s, with *Shafts*. She states of the treatment of sexual relationships in the women’s press, that with the growth of the feminist papers there was a “rapidity of change, the growth in openness”.⁸¹ The following illustration of the shift in attitude within the *Signal* on the literary representation of sexuality between 1894 and 1895 will support this finding. But I would add that that notion of “openness” needs to be subjected to greater critical scrutiny, and greater differentiation not only between the papers, but within them can be made. Whilst

some controversial issues such as male extramarital sexuality and venereal diseases were being more openly discussed, as Foucault's analysis proposes, sexuality was not simply becoming more visible, but was being produced or represented within specific and new discourses. Flint notes that Sibthorp's editorial indicates that *Shafts* supported the discussion of girls being taught the "facts of life".

We see in *Shafts* that women's writing on this subject should be both "bold" and "delicate". In a review of Ellis Ethelmer's (a pseudonym for Elizabeth Wolstenholme and her common-law husband, Ben Elmy)⁸² *The Human Flower* (1894), a book for children which discusses sexual physiology and reproduction, the work was said not to "seem to be the work of a woman's pen. It lacks somewhat of the delicate and deep insight a woman who would write on such a subject would put into it; and the language is not clothed always with such grace as from a woman's pen might be expected."⁸³ Yet the later book, *Baby Buds* (1895), a primer on sexual reproduction told through the life of plants was described as "sweet and tender" and found to be "excellent". Wolstenholme's pseudonym perhaps enabled her to publish and have reviewed in a wider market, more detailed and frank accounts of these subjects than she was able to in works authored as a woman. Sibthorp may have advocated knowledge of sexual relationships for girls, but details of sexual malpractice are an undefined area; they may have involved learning of the existence of prostitution and of venereal diseases for example through the treatments in Sarah Grand's novels, as we will see below, but as I have suggested, they probably did not include knowledge or practice of birth-control.

Hygiene was a modern theme central to the turn-of-the-century monthly periodical, *Womanhood*, a more conservative and conventional organ than either *Shafts* or the *Signal*, but even without such an ostensibly feminist agenda, it addressed many of the same issues. *Womanhood* (1899-1907) was "an illustrated magazine of literature, art, science, medicine

and hygiene and the progress of women”, edited by Mrs Ada S. Ballin. Hygiene takes on new meanings in addition to those discussed above, in the context of this publication; Ballin was a health reformer, editor of several journals and author of much hygienist literature. Her patterns for “hygienic” baby clothes were bought by Dr. Jaeger, who manufactured woollen clothing for rational dress. In her career as a health reformer, she positioned herself as writing subjectively; although she had been a student under medical men such as W. H. Corfield, professor of hygiene and public health at University College London, she marketed herself as writing “as a mother”, thus having authentic access to parenting in a way that neither a spinsterly qualified nurse, nor a medical man, merely by being male, could. Her writing was part of a rapidly growing market for mother and baby products, and her prose is punctuated with references to commercial health and hygiene products aimed at this new female consumer.

Health was proving to be an hospitable field for the New Woman; as Anna Davin has noted of the entry of women into paid caring work in the 1900s, “[i]n parallel with the insistence on motherhood, complementing though apparently contradicting it, was the development of employment and even careers for single women in the expanding field of health”.⁸⁴ The construction of the identity of motherhood was typically extended then during this period. In the writing of the eugenicist, Caleb W. Saleeby, for example, this role was extended to so-called “Virgin Mothers”, those not biologically mothers but acting in a professional “maternal” role. Saleeby made appeals to the maternal instinct of women to act in the raising of other women’s children, to serve the family and the domestic, and to work in philanthropic, voluntary and official capacities, endorsing women’s work in the paid and public arena, yet controlling it by referring it back to traditional icons and imagery amongst

which biological motherhood would then exist as yet another, if more exalted, means of women's service to the nation-state.

Ballin's *Womanhood* magazine sought to combine the more commercial interests of women's papers – fashion, cooking, problems and queries addressed to the editor on health and beauty – with interest in social and intellectual questions ranging from women's changing roles to discussion of the science of heredity. Contributors of serialised articles included notable authors from a high social class who published widely in a variety of mainstream periodicals: Mrs Arthur Henniker (a collaborator of Thomas Hardy), Laurence Alma-Tadema (daughter of the artist Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema) an author and contributor to the risqué *Yellow Book*, Lady May Jeune, and Sarah Grand.

The regular section of the periodical entitled, 'Woman's Parliament' which debated questions of social and moral etiquette for women, ran a discussion, "Should Clever Women Marry?" This featured the social purist feminist, Rosa Frances Swiney (1847-1922). As well as her bold and extremist polemic, *The Awakening of Women, or Woman's Part in Evolution* (1899), Swiney authored several publications which blended a unique mixture of theosophic mysticism and social and moral purity, and was editor of a feminist paper the *Awakener*. Swiney was born in, and lived under the Indian Raj for thirty years,⁸⁵ and in extolling the physical and psychical superiority of women her work engages extensively with the interpretation of Eastern mythology and spiritualism in Helen Blavatsky's theosophy. In her work she generated her own mysticism using ancient Egyptian symbolism with which to convey the sacred nature of motherhood. Ironically this Orientalism was used to reinforce an imperialistic racist cosmology; in *The Bar of Isis* (1907), the figure of the goddess was deployed to symbolise the divine virgin mother who could reverse the "present abnormal racial degeneracy"⁸⁶ through the condition of an "inviolat" and "gravid womb".⁸⁷ In such

texts she strategically assimilated both Eastern spiritualism and the science of Western enlightenment in order to propel her reader toward her eugenic utopia: “[i]t is on this important subject of preserving and transmitting untainted the purity and nobility of racial characteristics that woman, as mother, must bring her newly-acquired and increasing scientific knowledge to bear.”⁸⁸ Her ideas on race motherhood will be discussed further in chapter 5.

Barbara T. Gates has described Swiney as having a “womanist vision of nature”: one which was not limited to specific local issues but rather pushed for more global and rapid change, and associates her with Olive Anderson’s designation of “hyper feminism”, as a preacher of the superiority of women.⁸⁹ Gates suggests that Swiney’s theories of female supremacy minimised maleness “in light of the new, post-Darwinian science of genetics”;⁹⁰ however, her use of science to argue the inferiority of maleness predates her use of the rediscovered, and newly publicised, Mendelian theory which would inform the first fully worked out theory of genetics.⁹¹ In *The Awakening of Women*, Swiney’s belief in the biological “superfluity” of the male was developed through her interpretation of the well known, essentialist biology of Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson’s in *The Evolution of Sex* (1889) on female and male sex cells and their relative “katabolic” (active) and “anabolic” (passive) life forces. She also drew on – and subverted – the work of leading sexologist, Henry Havelock Ellis in *Man and Woman: A Study of Human Secondary Sexual Characters* (1894) to claim that woman was the original type of humanity of which man could be said to be the deviant variation. Following Ellis, Swiney maintained that men’s innate inferiority was manifested in the greater number of cases of male atavism, monstrosity, insanity, idiocy and criminality, and this gave credence to her claim for women’s innate superiority.

In her letter to the *Womanhood* journal in 1900, Swiney proposes that if clever women do not marry “the outlook is in truth an appalling one for the future evolution of the race”.⁹² This eugenic goal was her primary concern throughout her writing, and her outspoken rhetoric is based on the evidence of the “new psychology”. She believed that genius is inherited on the maternal side, and that the abilities of the child are all determined by the influence of the mother from the time of conception to birth, a pattern of development in which subsequent factors, such as environment, cannot modify the outcome. By citing the evangelist moral purity sentiments of eminent men such as Alfred Russel Wallace, Havelock Ellis and Robert Buchanan – especially their support for the “feminine factor” as the future for evolution – Swiney signals her familiarity with the scientific literature, and evokes a coterie of intellectual New Men who are already responsive to the “demands of the intellectual woman”, whose standard the average man should aspire to. At a time when the issue of “odd” and “superfluous” women was deemed to be at the mercy of a population of selective males, Swiney repositions women as powerfully sexually selective, issuing moral mandates and announcing their abstinence from marriage. Through women withholding relations with men, men can be taught the value of sexual continence: “[i]f man will not fall in with her higher rules of conduct and morality, he will be left severely alone until he recognises the irrevocableness of the position attained”⁹³ she opined; this ethic will ensure nothing less than the progress of the race. Swiney’s strategy in writing in *Womanhood*, a more conservative organ than either the *Signal* or *Shafts*, appears to moderate some of the radical, anti-male sentiment she expresses in the books described above. She describes a marriage of equals with a distinctly romantic cast: “mutual equality, mutual co-operation, mutual interests and mutual interdependence, subtly blended with the divine spirit of love, that, after all, is blind to so many imperfections, and clothes the beloved with its own intangible ideals and aspirations.”⁹⁴

One woman writing in reply to Swiney's essay asserted that it is imperative that clever women, or "women of culture", as she defines them, become mothers, and that mothers should be cultured women. She treats the theory of the transmission of acquired characters with caution, citing Professor MacCunn in *The Making of Character* who found that until "Lamarckians and Weissmannians settle their differences [...] results are too uncertain to be made the basis of responsible action" and Baldwin's suggestion that it is "almost impossible to discriminate between that which is inherited and that which is due to environment". For this reader, women of culture would ensure their child's development through a harmonious spiritual home atmosphere and learning environment. She concludes that "both ancient and modern philosophers agree in teaching that environment is more effective towards the well being of a child than the alleged gifts of an inheritance".⁹⁵

One of the central tenets of Swiney's philosophy, which would ensure men and women's ascension to the next stage of spiritual evolution was the abstinence of sex during pregnancy and for at least a postnatal twelve month period. This social purity line on sex during pregnancy was not necessarily a widely held belief amongst feminists, for medical literature recommended a less purist choice. In Ada S. Ballin's guide to women's pre and post-natal health care, under a section on miscarriage she advises that

[t]he most likely time to miscarry is at the time when the monthly period would have taken place had the woman not been pregnant. [...] she must occupy a separate bed from her husband. It is necessary for women who have any tendency to miscarriage to have no "relations" with their husbands while they are pregnant.⁹⁶

It seems that abstention from sex during pregnancy is an exception, rather than a norm; it is a precaution during certain times of the month, and for women who have previously miscarried. Ballin's well-researched and often frank, practical information was concerned to encourage women to acquaint themselves better with their bodies, and inform them through medical knowledge of physiological conditions during pregnancy and postpartum states and of sanitation practices. Her periodical, *Womanhood*, although not as explicit in its address of these concerns, brought them into view, and thus some knowledge of hygiene and medicine into women's reach.

Hygiene, health and New Woman fiction

One of the most significant features of the culture of the feminist periodicals, *Shafts* and *Signal* was the way in which they developed a female critique of the impact of women on the literary landscape and the logics of debate on the sexual subjects of the woman novel, and a specifically feminist literary criticism as Kate Flint has asserted.⁹⁷ Angelique Richardson has demonstrated how the authors of New Woman fiction aimed to expose the impurity of male sexuality, the sexual double standards and hypocrisy of marriage through their plots, and the acceptability of such themes in "unhealthy" male-authored romances.⁹⁸ Yet their critics in the periodical press attacked "the woman novel" as the source of contamination, and denounced such unwholesome writing by both men and women as symptomatic of degeneration. Metaphors of contamination and purity abounded in contestation over ideological boundaries for representation of sexuality. The fin-de-siècle cultural dialectic between modernity and decadence fused the figure of the New Woman and the Aesthete. Twinned as both pathogens and pathological,⁹⁹ their writing, said one critic, should be feared by society which "still dreads the influenza and shudders at the approach of typhoid, but" he argued, "its most

dangerous and subtle foes are beyond question ‘neurotics’ and hysteria in their manifold forms”.¹⁰⁰

In an article in *Shafts* of 1894, ‘Mr Buchanan’s appeals for “Literary Freedom”’, the writer “X”, attacks Buchanan’s claim that “the secret of modern literary decadence and gloom is the New Womanhood invading”.¹⁰¹ The writer defends the purpose novel when she states unequivocally that “there is room for literature as an art, plenty of room, more than room also, a need for literature which confronts human life and its woes – chiefly due to sexual relation – as it is and as they are, and which will not be silenced.”¹⁰² Buchanan had argued that the recent feminisation of literature – which he associates with naturalism – had stripped literature of its dignity and nobility: “everywhere in Literature nowadays we find, instead of great thoughts and noble aspirations and faith in the destiny of Humanity only the mean phenomena of a suburban villa – the rinsing of tea-cups, the opening of dust-bins [...] and the washing of dirty linen.”¹⁰³ Playfully extending Buchanan’s metaphors of feminine domesticity to describe the aims of a more realistic fiction, “X” insists that the “ ‘opening of the dust-bins’ has been the prelude to clearing them out, and the ‘washing of the linen’ a hygienic and wholesome necessity”.¹⁰⁴ She historicises his evocation of the greatness of the Elizabethan age and its masculine literature and points up its barbarities: “religious free thinkers burnt alive in market places or imprisoned in dungeons; lunatics chained up like wild animals and scored with the lash”.¹⁰⁵ Debunking a myth of a golden era her feminist critique firmly locates literature as part of a misogynist culture – citing for example women’s silencing and lack of legal rights in the sixteenth century.¹⁰⁶

New Woman fiction had a contested but sometimes also fruitful dialogue with other male dominated literary fields such as Naturalism, Decadence and Aestheticism as later chapters will explore. A regular feature in the *Signal* was ‘Between the Lights’. This took the form of

witty, epigrammatic, aphoristic dialogue between a Wildean cast of female characters designated the “Advanced Woman”, the “Woman of No Importance”, the “Ordinary Person” and the “Society Dame”, representing and challenging different perspectives on the “woman question” of the month. The appropriation of Wildean stylistics for a feminist agenda demonstrates a point of contiguity with the Aesthetes, and how the New Woman was able to appropriate this satirical prose and politicise it with feminist objects whilst retaining its stylistic and technical character. In June 1894 the *Signal* responded to a symposium held in the *New Review*, entitled ‘The Tree of Knowledge’, a discussion of the treatment of sexual relationships in fiction and sex-education for the young held by novelists.¹⁰⁷ The ‘Woman of No Importance’, drawing her name from the eponymous mother from Oscar Wilde’s 1893 play, states that it is:

‘..my contention [...] that the unmarried girl should not be blindfolded.’ ‘Blindfolded! God forbid! I would give her spectacles’, exclaimed the Advanced Woman. ‘Yes, and science primers as well’ the Society Dame mocked. ‘And why not?’ asked the Woman of No Importance ‘.....decent science is infinitely preferable to indecent suggestion’.¹⁰⁸

Scientific and medical knowledge of sexual reproduction and disease was championed by many New Women novelists, most notably Sarah Grand, one of the writers who had contributed to the forum on ‘The Tree of Knowledge’. The ‘Woman of No Importance’s’ assertion reflects the argument of many feminists for whom scientific discourse, although traditionally a masculine preserve, could enlighten women by making sex education acceptable, thereby bringing it into the home, and enable and inform debate in the public sphere. Alluding to the title of Grand’s controversial, best-selling novel, the *Woman of No*

Importance concludes, “knowledge and innocence are the Heavenly Twins.”¹⁰⁹ In this dialectical thinking, the hitherto male province of science must be revealed to women and girls, and an understanding of evolutionary biology and medicine made in order to subvert the traditional coupling of knowledge and sin, thus questioning the terms of the opposition. Equipped with facts from physiological and medical texts, girls can still remain innocent and indeed, only with this knowledge will they be able to remain physically pure. The hidden binary of innocence in this statement is also guilt; to claim a position of innocence is to disclaim responsibility, thereby accruing guilt.

Girls’ ignorance of sexual matters was defended by many anti-New Woman writers like Lady Jeune, in an article in the *Fortnightly Review*, ‘The Revolt of the Daughters’.¹¹⁰ The article is a reply to Mrs Crackenthorpe’s article of the same title in the *Nineteenth Century*. Although Jeune claimed to support younger women’s ambition for education and career she describes the New Woman as “one of those excrescences which appear from time to time in nature”:¹¹¹ a natural evolutionary phenomenon but nonetheless a “monstrous” aberration. In the interest of maintaining the Victorian “angel” figure she clung to an ideal of girlhood as intrinsically ignorant and thus powerless, hoping that we should “lose something of the robust intellectual self-reliance of emancipated girls”, that we might always have “the daughters of our hearts, ignorant, wilful, perhaps not always prudent [but with] a belief in the illusions of life”.¹¹² By giving girls “knowledge of life”, do we wish, she asks, “to see our girls half men in theory and half women in inexperience and ignorance [?]”¹¹³ In welcoming the reformation of girls’ upbringing, the opinions expressed by Sibthorp in *Shafts* provide a strong contrast to the views expressed by Lady Jeune, particularly in the distrust she shared with other feminists in challenging Jeune’s reactionary opinion that “what women must learn of life and all its shadows had best be taught by their safest counsellor and friend, their husband”,¹¹⁴ and

instead furthering shifts in the balance of power to women and girls through selective, informed reading: innocence could only mean ignorance.

French Naturalism with its interest in the biological motivations of human behaviour, theories of heredity and confrontation of social problems had also contributed to the impetus amongst British novelists for a new candour and openness in representing sexual behaviours. The leading French Naturalist writer, Emile Zola (1840-1902), had aimed at a realism based on a thorough medical precision and the “rigour of scientific truth”,¹¹⁵ his methodology was grounded in the work of a writer from another field, Dr. Claude Bernard in his *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine* (1865). Zola claimed that the intercourse between the fields of medicine and literature could bring to light the “truth” of human behaviours and their grounding in the discoveries of evolutionary science.

In a *Signal* of 1894, a leading article on modern literature is developed through an analogy of novelists as doctors and medical scientists which comments on the critical paradigm that had underpinned the work of the Naturalists, and subsequently influenced some New Woman writers, and inflects it with a gothic carnivalesque. The writer describes the good doctor not as a travelling showman figure who has “paraded the human monstrosities and physical deformities through the streets of the town”,¹¹⁶ but as a discreet medic who instead seeks to hide “the abnormal and the diseased”, thus demonstrating the highest “healthful instinct”,¹¹⁷ proper to the profession. The role of the doctor is to engage in professional studies which “shall lead to a better preservation of the normal and the type”, thereby enacting a eugenic manipulation of “natural selection”. Opening out her medical analogy, the writer suggests that “in modern literature we find almost the dreadful counterpart of that hideous spectacle which we have imagined – a symposium concerned with the malformed, the deformed, and the loathsomely diseased”.¹¹⁸ The good novelist acts like the responsible doctor who hides away

the abject subjects of society. In language which equates immorality with physical deformity, the “modern woman” of the new novels is described as “a spiritual hunchback”. She is “unmaternal, fierce towards her sex-conditions, wildly bent on selfish development or selfish pleasures”; the writer begs “[i]f all this is real life, hide it away in clinics”,¹¹⁹ a comment which is uncomfortably close to reflecting the situation of the incarceration of women in asylums who were held to be “mad”, socially or sexually deviant, as critics such as Elaine Showalter have documented.¹²⁰

The description of the New Woman as unnatural, wild and selfish exercises the lexicon of conservative, male literary critics, and reproduces the judgements of writers like Buchanan and Stutfield. Yet a year later the *Signal* gave its qualified support to the approach of taboo subjects in the “woman novel”. The woman novel had been hijacked by an anti-feminist, Grant Allen, whose novel, *The Woman Who Did* (1895) – discussed in the following chapter – had a weak, self-destructive New Woman heroine whose actions caused the New Woman to be associated with “free love union”; women’s writing had to be protected from such misleading, destructive alliances. In the Spring of 1895 an article in the *Signal* appeared entitled, ‘ “The woman who” – didn’t’,¹²¹ a title which clearly refers to Allen’s text which was just then causing a stir with its rebellious, principled protagonist who chooses to have a baby out of wedlock. Lady Somerset critiques the construction of the woman novel in the popular cultural imagination as an unwholesome contagion, by deploying a “reverse discourse” from a counter hegemonic perspective:

We have hardly recovered from the shock of one woman novel before we are down with another attack of the prevailing mental influenza [...] That the tone of the woman novel is unhealthy it requires no acumen to discern, it is absolutely poisonous; but, like most

unsanitary exhalations, it is far better the distemper should come to the surface in the body politic and thus be thrown off, than that by remaining hidden it should become chronic.¹²²

Somerset's analogy makes diseased cultural texts the natural response to poisoned social conditions: "circumstances have been subtly at work in women's lives that have engendered in many instances much of the malarial moral influence we deeply deplore."¹²³

This holistic discourse of disease can be related to the Hygienic movement introduced to Britain from America earlier in the century by health reformers such as Mary and Thomas Nichols, whose concern was with a healthier life style largely based on vegetarianism, temperance and rational dress. Its strong links to socialism and to women's rights encouraged feminist participation. In the writings of American hygienist, Russell Thacher, author of *Sexual Physiology & Hygiene*,¹²⁴ reproduced in the *Hygienic Advertiser*: "[d]isease is not, as is commonly supposed, an enemy at war with the vital powers, but a remedial effort – a process of purification and reparation. It is not a thing to be destroyed, subdued or suppressed but an action to be regulated and directed."¹²⁵ Disease, in the hygienist teaching is invariably the reaction of the healthy individual coping with the poisonous influences around it; the symptoms of sickness are evidence of the effort to rejuvenate and heal. In another article attacking the use of conventional drugs, Dr. D. C. Moore in the *Hygienic Advertiser* asked

[w]hat is sickness and disease? Nature's effort to remove the causes which aside from mechanical and mental shock are obstructions produced from retained excretions and poisons taken in with food, air and water, or as medicine, so called, swallowed, inhaled or absorbed in the erroneous belief that they, in some mysterious way cure the patient. [...]

All medicines are poisons.¹²⁶

Somerset's approach is informed by the unorthodox and holistic discourse of the hygienists. Whilst concurring with the popular view that the texts are shocking, her analogy sees the symptoms of disease in the social body not as perverse but as a protest against what is poisoning it: the social values and laws which commodify and control women. Somerset thus insists on the necessary critical intervention by feminists in fiction in order to address social questions, even if this is a departure from "tasteful" subjects.

Some male-authored works on the woman question were reviewed positively by the women's papers, such as those by Thomas Hardy, George Moore, Henrik Ibsen and fellow Norwegian, Bjørnstjerne M. Bjørnson.¹²⁷ For example, the reviewer of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), the socialist poet, founder of the feminist Pioneer Club and regular contributor to *Shafts*, Dora B. Montefiore, identified Sue Bridehead as a representative of the New Woman: "in the case of Sue Bridehead the novelist has well nigh excelled himself. She is the type of the upward struggling woman, unconscious almost yet in her struggle" with a "delicate ideal purpose".¹²⁸ But the periodicals primarily formed an important forum with which to counter the cultural space given to, and patriarchal bias of, reviews of women's novels, and through their range of feminist critical perspectives, offered readers new ways of reading through attention to language in relation to gender.

Margaret Shurmer Sibthorp's review of Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaus* (1897) highlighted the double standard made for women's writing by reviewers in the press which could not – or would not – recognise feminist perspectives and knowledges. The typical critic on the mainstream periodicals is described as working in market conditions which do not allow him to devote any time to the book he is reviewing, and thus participating in a cultural economy which aims to examine serious artistic works "while you wait". Further,

he is described as having no reverence for art or great thought: this “average flippant self-confident critic behaves to art and to artists as a Bank Holiday cad behaves to nature – like a cad”.¹²⁹ A substantial, nine pages were devoted to discussing *The Daughters of Danaus*, perhaps the most space given to any one book in the paper, suggesting the role *Shafts* saw for itself in counteracting the negative or neglectful reviewing of New Woman fiction in the general press. Sibthorp argued that

[m]atters connected with women, especially when on the lines of progression, seem to be beyond the capacity of the average male reviewer, and the woman who reviews, too often alas! So cowardly, so dominated by male opinion and conventional prejudice, as to be incapable of uttering original opinions, even if she entertains any.¹³⁰

Her position indicates the way in which editorial policy aimed at forming a specifically female space in which an alternative feminist critique of literature could be confidently developed, producing its own critical tools and values about women’s use of language and the right to occupy a place in public speech.

In 1929, Virginia Woolf looked forward to a time when “literature will become for women, as for men, an art to be studied”, and women’s writing could move beyond what she saw as its unsophisticated and undisciplined infancy to “become, more than at present, a work of art like any other, and its resources and its limitations will be explored”.¹³¹ In the 1890s, for *Shafts* the polemicism of the New Woman writers’ purpose novel did not preclude it from being art. Female reformers redefining what literature might be, sought to negotiate the conflict between “art for art’s sake”(with its origins in a reactionary Romanticism) and the

politics of the “purpose novel” (with its “new” ethical impulse); as a vehicle for feminist beliefs, the novel must also be a formal intervention into masculine narratives and values.

Sarah Grand’s *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), which was shocking to so many reviewers for its frank treatment of venereal disease and extramarital relations, is celebrated by Sibthorp in the pages of *Shafts* as a novel of “immortal power”.¹³² The unapologetic didacticism of the novel – one of the primary criticisms it received in the press¹³³ – which relegated it to a position of lower cultural status in the literary market, is acknowledged in this review, but Sibthorp approves the way in which it is so artfully disguised that “readers are under the pleasing delusion that they make their own deductions”.¹³⁴ “Purpose” here, is held to be central to the feminist novel, which is charged with taking in hand the responsibility of educating the public in a new morality. The role of the subjective and emotional, too, is important; that the novel proceeds from the “refined purity of the mind and heart”¹³⁵ of the author is one of its greatest attributes. The novel’s preachy quality does not, for Sibthorp, conflict with its ability to attain to the status of a timeless classic, indeed it is this very quality which will make it canonical: “this book will take its place among that *deathless company* [the stars]; it will accomplish that work for which it has been sent forth”.¹³⁶ The novel’s handling of real ethical issues as urgent concerns is of course integral to its feminist politics, and it is for its life-likeness that it is valued, its vivid characterisation, especially of the eponymous twins – “a unique and incomparable creation” – much of whose humour lies in acts and speech typically challenging to gender stereotypes.¹³⁷ The novel is held to be truthful and pertinent to women’s experience; words derived from “life” are used twelve times in a 1000 word review, underlining its application to real issues in the woman’s movement. Sibthorp exalts a peculiarly gendered language register The novel’s treatment of vice is found “strengthening” in its ruthlessness, yet it is also considered a source of female pride that this

“woman’s pen” has written so that “even the most prudish may read and be greatly exalted”.¹³⁸ Unlike some other reviewers of the novel, Sibthorp insists that Grand has not compromised her femininity in writing about “soul killing vices”, indeed, the traditional association of Victorian femininity with spiritual strength is drawn upon to describe Grand’s qualities as an author. New Woman writers were struggling in the confines of a central paradox: to keep their claim to “womanly” femininity at the same time as their critics discredited and denounced them as “unsexing” themselves.

Women who chose to question the institution of marriage beyond its unjust laws and to write about “free love” were generally less well received by the editors of the women’s press. When George Bedborough, editor of the *Adult*, and leader of the Legitimation League (a group which aimed to secure rights to offspring born out of wedlock, with the belief that there can be no individual personal liberty without the superseding of marriage) claimed kinship with the New Woman writer by identifying the League as one of the “first fruits of recent novels (written almost exclusively by women) in which what is commonly known as free love has been openly preached”, he may have been referring to writers such as Emma Frances Brooke and George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne). A former contributor to *Shafts*, Bedborough’s identification of the League’s aims with those of feminism did not go down well with the editor of *Shafts*; Sibthorp reviewed the *Adult* in April 1898 and damned it in no uncertain terms; she fervently expressed her wish that “it had not been given to the public” and in laying claim to the moral high-ground, declared that “in regard to the latest number I would suggest that the type be destroyed and every existing issue burnt.”¹³⁹

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, *Shafts* found Emma Frances Brooke’s triple-decker, *Life the Accuser* (1896)¹⁴⁰ to be too preoccupied with its Amazonian New Woman heroine’s sexuality: “[i]t lays too much emphasis upon, and exalts into too much importance the

physical, forgetting that though the physical part of our complex nature must have consideration, yet must it be held in its own place, and its place is to be dominated by the mental and spiritual.”¹⁴¹ The reviewer particularly finds offence in the scene in which the middle-class female protagonists out walking in the countryside, return the gaze of the male haymakers. At first the men watch the athletics of the heroine, Rosalie as she vaults over a gate into a field – “her beautiful body flew over the barrier with light rustle of raiment” (*LA* 105) – her graceful, erotic gymnastics prompt “[l]ooks of sleepy admiration [which] stole from face to face. Rosalie stood on the other side in cool unconcern, pushing the falling hair back from her neck, and panting gently. She looked scarcely more conscious than a doe” (*LA* 105). Later, the girls look back at the bodies of the working men. The eroticisation of the health and “fitness” of rural labourers is enacted through an active female gaze, with the New Woman-ish Rosalie asking her friend Elizabeth, “have you ever wished to be a working girl, brown untidy with burnt hair and bare feet, and to belong to a strong sinewy splendid man like that? To be in his power?” (*LA* 108) The reviewer protests that the

scene in the fields where Rosalie and her friends watch the labourers contains some sentences through which this pen would like to draw a line, blotting them out. They are not quite honest to the deeper truth, and are out of taste [...] the lower, though true in its place we should be ever casting off. ¹⁴²

The reviewer patronisingly suggests that with the wisdom of age, the “greying” Brooke will recognise the greater, more mature, spiritual dimension of love, “[w]hy not have given us with the physical that higher part which dominates it and eventually displaces it? – for it is the nobler part of us”,¹⁴³ she insists. This difference and antagonism between the “elder”

stateswoman and the “younger”, new generation of feminist writers who questioned what they saw as the repressive prudery of the Victorians, demonstrates Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of intergenerational challenge (which may not be between those different chronologically in age) in the literary market.¹⁴⁴ Such confrontations embody the shifts of position-takings in restricted, literary sub-fields between the new-comers or avant-garde, and those more established figures. In her construction of an active female sexuality, Brooke very precisely represents a younger challenger to the romantic fiction of earlier woman writers and to the sexual politics of the feminist old-garde.

The interest in moving toward the representation of a greater autonomy and freedom in women’s sexuality in Brooke’s novels was integral to her interest in a “positive” eugenics in which fitter offspring would be produced through temporary or unofficial sexual relationships. Hostility toward the portrayal of women as sexually assertive and active outside the limits of matrimony by the editors of both the *Signal* and *Shafts*, meant that the representation of eugenic goals in Brooke’s fiction were overlooked, despite being a shared hope with purity feminism. Somerset, the then editor, reviewing Brooke’s *A Superfluous Woman* (1894)¹⁴⁵ in the *Signal* was confounded by this socialist novel in which the high-society heroine Jessamine flees London for the Scottish Highlands and desires a free love union; she admitted that it “stirs our admiration by a certain undoubted power”, but her moral objections lead to her suggestion that it leaves the reader “puzzled” and “regretting much”.¹⁴⁶ Her strongest criticism of the narrative is of what she sees as a simple role reversal in which the heroine is the exhausted society woman, seeking a fresh and virginal son of the soil: “the history of the man attracted by the purity and grace of the country maiden, when, weary of the exotics of civilisation, he turns to the simple charms of the flowers of the fields, is an outworn theme”.¹⁴⁷ Brooke’s novel does indeed turn on these roles.¹⁴⁸ Somerset’s complaint does

make the significant demand that women create new heroines for feminism, and new roles. But this depiction of a sexually assertive female character makes this far more than the simple, unproblematic substitution of women for men of which Somerset complains, and this depiction of her “wild fleeting passion” (she seeks a pagan sexual maternity and shuns the confines of marriage), perhaps underlies Somerset’s objection to the character.

The efficacy of these novels as propaganda for eugenics might be measured from their reception in the journals as the site of their critical negotiation. The ideological implications of the way in which the “superfluous woman”, Jessamine, is framed as sexually selective, appear not to be recognised. Such a reading suggests that eugenicism did not function with a singular object and the means by which fitness could be attained were as significant as the goal, as chapter 2 will demonstrate in relation to the writings of Grant Allen.

Ann Heilmann reads the Highlands setting of *The Superfluous Woman* as the antithesis of domesticity,¹⁴⁹ and indeed this is one of the ways in which this setting functions for the heroine’s development. The location is also imagined by the protagonist as a regenerative Nature to escape to, which would restore her vitality after the enervating cultural environs of metropolitan aristocratic circles. But in Jessamine’s romantic choice of the Highland peasant Colin, a struggling young farmer supporting his parents, with honourable and traditional notions of domesticity and a life of purity, has racial, eugenic motives. He is fit in terms of his physicality and in the vigour the mixture of his sound heredity would produce: “[h]e was wholesome, from his sunburnt skin to the inmost core of his heart”(SW 158) The socialist ethos expressed in Edward Carpenter’s ideal to “follow humanity at the plough”¹⁵⁰ informs the depiction of the healthy Scottish rustic whose class identity is essentialised as a positive “racial quality”.

The novel is also roundly criticised because the heroine's emancipatory endeavours evaporate and she returns to the decayed society life which she had tried to leave behind; when she makes a marriage to a syphilitic old aristocrat she degenerates into tragic circumstances. Jessamine's self induced miscarriage is as an act of race motherhood: " 'I will tear my wish out of the centre of things,' she cried [...] 'There is nothing', she said 'stronger than a mother' " (*SW* 261) – themes which will be dealt with at length in chapter 5. "There is no excuse for selling herself as she does, soul and body in to degrading bondage" a disapproving Somerset complains, despite the explanations offered by the text with its insistence on Jessamine's hereditary atavistic disposition to seek corrupt company. The writers in these periodicals looked for heroines with steadfast principles in their fiction; in general, novels in which the heroine remains true to her principles, even with tragic consequences were praised. Yet Brooke's novel was measured against the strong editorial framework of moral and social purity in the *Signal*, and although it would admit discussion of sexual relations to its pages – as Somerset's article on cultural health and contamination in relation to female fiction in a dramatic volte-face in 1895 would demonstrate – women's greater control over and choice in marriage or chastity, not "free love", were the means to "race" progress which Somerset endorsed.

The representation of active female sexuality was generally discouraged and disapproved of in line with a moral purity and theosophist cosmology then, in which the highest form of love for women to aspire to was a spiritual, even aphysical, intercourse between the sexes. The *Signal*'s emphasis on the abhorrence of women dwelling on "the animal plane", and instead urging them to hasten evolution by progressing through intellectual and emotional life toward the apex of the spiritual is characteristic of the editorial whose

insistence on the “higher” nature of women condones a notion of female lack, and often neglects to address women’s sexuality positively.

The articles and correspondence columns of the feminist periodicals register a wide ranging involvement in debates related to the science of health and hygiene. Women’s deep involvement with the new “hygienic” practices in sanitation and fitness gave rise to greater liberty, as well as health, for the middle-classes. Their recruitment into new institutions such as Physical Training Colleges and Hygienic Homes contributed in turn to their professionalisation in education and in higher public profiles. Women continued to challenge the polite association between private and public by mobilising the idea of “decent science” in order to assert the right of girls and women to be educated into knowledge of female sexual health, whether through the language of biology in the children’s primers on sex-education of Ellis Ethelmer, or the physiology of the pamphlets for adults produced by such health reformers as Ada Ballin. The metaphors and analogies of contamination and purity in society which organised debates on fiction, and commented on the contribution of women to the national culture were both deployed and argued with in the journals *Shafts* and the *Woman’s Signal*. The role of health and fitness, even before the panic around the poor physiques of the recruits to the Boer war at the turn of the century, was closely linked to the formation of national identity and empire; and in the journals, the intersection of hygienic discourses with eugenic anxieties, proliferate.

¹ See Michelle Elizabeth Tusan, ‘Inventing the New Woman: Print Culture and Identity Politics During the Fin de Siècle’, *Victorian Periodicals Review* 31:2 (Summer 1998):169-82.

² Lesley A. Hall, ‘Margaret Shurmer Sibthorp’, draft entry for *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University, forthcoming).

³ *Shafts* 2:2 (April 1893): 23. References to *Shafts* will vary as publication frequency decreased from weekly to monthly.

⁴ Annie E. Holdsworth was born in Jamaica to a clergyman father. She wrote several novels including *Joanna Traill, Spinster* (1894) and worked on Stead's *Review of Reviews* in the 1890s. She married the poet, Eugene Lee-Hamilton (Vernon Lee's half-brother) in 1898.

⁵ Rosemary T. Van Arsdell, 'Mrs Florence Fenwick-Miller and *The Woman's Signal* 1895-1899', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 15:3 (Fall 1982): 107-118.

⁶ Rebecca Virag has argued that this iconography which was extensively deployed by the Maternity and Child Welfare centres, became associated with eugenicist ideas of race motherhood. See her article 'Eugenics and Motherhood: Images of the Maternal Body in the Work of Two Late Nineteenth-Century Artists', *Nineteenth-Century Feminisms*, forthcoming.

⁷ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997): 69.

⁸ *Signal* (6 Oct. 1898): 216.

⁹ Rosemary T. Van Arsdell, 'Mrs Florence Fenwick-Miller and the *Woman's Signal*, 1895-1899', *Victorian Periodicals Review*: 107-118 (109).

¹⁰ Laurel Brake, *Subjugated Knowledges: Journalism, Gender and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1994): 11.

¹¹ 'The Society of Women Journalists' is advertised by Madeleine Greenwood in *Shafts*: "[t]he Qualification for membership is as follows: any woman who has worked in the literary or artistic department of any recognised journal or magazine as a paid contributor for a period of two years; or as probationers, women who have worked as above described for a period of one year." *Shafts* 5:3 (Aug. 1895).

¹² Frances Power Cobbe, *Woman's Penny Paper* (3 Nov. 1888): 5.

¹³ *Woman's Signal* (22 Feb. 1894): 119.

¹⁴ Laurel Brake describes how Stead offered a scholarship bursary to women readers which by enabling them a university education would support the greater entry of women into politics. Stead stated how he regretted the small number of women journalists. See Brake, (1994): 101.

¹⁵ *Woman's Penny Paper* (6 Sept. 1890).

¹⁶ Brady records that Sibthorp used Stead's offices to conduct lectures during the 1890s, see Brady (1978): 7.

¹⁷ Evelyn March-Phillipps, 'Women's Newspapers', *Fortnightly Review* 335 (Nov 1894): 661.

¹⁸ See for example, Matthew Arnold. 'Up to Easter', *Nineteenth Century* 21 (May 1887).

¹⁹ Ibid: 665.

²⁰ Ibid: 669.

²¹ Ibid: 669.

²² See for example, Evelyn March-Phillipps, 'The Progress of Women's Trades-Unions' *Fortnightly Review* 60:92 (1893): 92-104.

²³ Evelyn March-Phillipps, 'Women's Newspapers' (1894): 666.

²⁴ Barbara G. Walker records that Hygeia, meaning "Health" was the title of Mother Rhea Coronis, and was applied to one of the goddess's milk-giving breasts, the other was Panacea. Later, the goddess Hygeia was relegated to male authority by being named as one of the daughters of the doctor god, Aesculapius. Barbara G. Walker, *The Women's Encyclopaedia of Myths and Secrets* (San Francisco: Harper Collins 1983): 420.

²⁵ *WPP* (23 Aug. 1890): 526.

²⁶ See Sheila Fletcher, *Women First: The Female Tradition in English Physical Education 1880-1980* (London: Athlone Press, 1984): 20.

²⁷ For example, Arabella Keneally's articles on 'Women Athletes', *Nineteenth Century* (April and July, 1899) berate the selfishness of female cyclists who enjoy riding freely in their own time, thus neglecting their household and family duties.

²⁸ *WPP* (23 Aug. 1890): 528.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ *WPP* (20 Sept.1890): 576.

³¹ Sheila Fletcher records how Madame Bergman-Österberg sent her students to Galton's anthropometric laboratory for measurement, in *Women First* (1984): 28.

³² *WPP* (5 July 1890): 439.

³³ Ibid: 439.

³⁴ Patricia Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press* (Kentucky: Kentucky University Press, 1990): 28.

³⁵ Norman Brady *Shafts and the Quest for a New Morality* (University of Warwick, Unpublished MA thesis, 1978): 100.

³⁶ Ibid: 4.

³⁷ Ibid: 42.

³⁸ Edith Ward was author of 'Theosophy and Modern Science, a lecture' (1906), 'The vital question, an address on social purity, to women' (1892), and *Light from the East: selections from the teachings of the Buddha*, arranged with an introduction by E. Ward (1901).

³⁹ Ward saw no contradiction between theosophy and modern science. Blavatsky, and later Annie Besant, both saw Theosophy as legitimate scientific enquiry. Ward expounded upon this connection in her pamphlet, *Theosophy and Modern Science* (Theosophical Publishing Society, London 1906): "Theosophia – Divine Wisdom – cannot be spoken of in relation to Modern Science for it embraces all Science – Ancient and Modern – it can be outside none"; theosophy shared with physics methods, standpoint and object. In this pamphlet she detailed how Madame Blavatsky, leader of the Theosophy movement, had anticipated some of the recent investigations of modern science, including the origin of life at the North Polar ice caps, and the radiant properties of matter associated with the phenomenon of the aurora borealis.

⁴⁰ For details of the theosophy movement see Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁴¹ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1995): 133.

⁴² *Shafts* 1:1 (3 Nov.1892): 2.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Gillian Beer, 'Authentic Tidings of Invisible Things', *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight*. Eds. Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay.(London: Routledge,1996): 85.

⁴⁶ Ibid: 86.

⁴⁷ *Shafts* 1:1 (3 Nov.1892): 2.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Shafts* 1:1(3 Nov.1892): 2.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Norman Brady *Shafts* (1978): 21.

⁵⁴ E.B Tylor, a president of the Anthropological Institute, tentatively enquired into Galton's interest in spiritualism, a subject upon which scientists were often deeply divided: "[i]t occurs to me to ask you whether you have read a book called 'The Lord's Dealings with George Müller' which is a curious record of 'special providence', sums of money coming to meet prayers."(14 March, 1875). Letters to Francis Galton: no.190, Galton Papers, University College London. In 1884, A. R. Wallace remarked upon Galton's discussion on the "objective efficacy of prayer" that "the method of general statistical enquiry you have adopted could possible lead to true results in this case [...] it seems to me that here is an equally good test to

be found in the cases of individuals, whose prayers have been objectively answered, not once only but scores of hundreds of times; and generally, but specifically and in detail". (27 July 1884) no.336, Galton Papers, University College London.

⁵⁵ *Shafts* (14 Jan.1893): 167.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Shafts* (14 Jan.1893):167.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² J.F.Nisbet, *Marriage and Heredity. A View of Psychological Evolution* (London: Ward & Downey, 1889).

⁶³ Geoffrey Mortimer, 'Immoral Marriage', *Shafts* (28 Jan.1893): 196.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*: 196.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*:196.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*:196.

⁶⁷ The *Signal* recommended the book, *Marriage and Heredity: A Book for Mothers* published by the White Ribbon Co. for the British Women's Temperance Association. The temperance movement placed great emphasis on the effect of pre-natal care upon the baby, as that which was hereditarily transmitted from the mother. Lady Somerset cites from the text a tale from Goethe which she suggests is, "a wonderful story, that more than any I have ever heard, shows how this law of initial heredity lies behind what would otherwise be one of the deepest mysteries of life". This moralistic, Lamarckian influenced narrative extols the beneficial effects of reading "great literature" for the working-classes for producing "fitter" children; a poor mother has one daughter who grows up to be of refined sensibility and superior to the other coarse, family members, but wonders why. Goethe attributes this outcome to her reading W. Scott's *Lady of the Lake* whilst pregnant. *Signal* (25 Jan.1894): 67.

⁶⁸ An article in *Shafts* which demands the franchise in the light of women's rights under marriage law and custody of children.

⁶⁹ *Shafts* (18 Feb.1893): 250.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*: 250.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*: 250

⁷² *Shafts* (18 Feb.1893): 251.

⁷³ *Ibid.*: 251.

⁷⁴ *Shafts* (18 Feb.1893): 252.

⁷⁵ *Shafts* (March 1893): 345.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*: 345.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*: 347.

⁷⁸ *WH* (5 Sept.1891): 730.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*: 730.

⁸⁰ See W.T.Stead, 'Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon', *Pall Mall Gazette* (4 July, 1885).

⁸¹ Kate Flint *The Woman Reader 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993): 154.

⁸² For detail of Wolstenholme's career and relationship with Elmy and the woman's movement, see Sandra Stanley Holton, 'Free Love and Victorian Feminism: The Divers Matrimonials of Elizabeth Wolstenholme and Ben Elmy' *Victorian Studies* 37:2 (Winter, 1994): 199-222.

⁸³ *Shafts* (Feb 1894): 309.

⁸⁴ Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', *History Workshop* 5, 1978: 51.

- ⁸⁵ George Robb, 'Race Motherhood: Moral Eugenics vs. Progressive Eugenics, 1880-1920'. *Maternal Instincts: Visions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Britain, 1875-1925* Eds. Claudia Nelson and Ann Summer Holmes. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997): 59-74: 65.
- ⁸⁶ Frances Swiney, *The Bar of Isis: The Law of the Mother* (The Open Road Publishing Co., 1907):17.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid: 16.
- ⁸⁸ Frances Swiney, *The Awakening of Women, or Women's Past in Evolution* (1899; London: William Reeves, 1908): 121.
- ⁸⁹ Barbara T. Gates, *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian women Embrace the Living World* (London: Chicago University Press, 1998): 152.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid: 154.
- ⁹¹ On the "rediscoveries" of Gregor Mendel's theories, see Robert Olby, *Origins of Mendelism* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1966;1985): 109-137.
- ⁹² Frances Swiney, *Womanhood* vol. 4 (1900): 64.
- ⁹³ Ibid.
- ⁹⁴ Ibid.
- ⁹⁵ *Womanhood*: vol. 5 (1900): 66.
- ⁹⁶ Mrs Ada S. Ballin, *The Expectant Mother* [pamphlet] 1903: 39.
- ⁹⁷ See Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader* (1993).
- ⁹⁸ For an excellent discussion of Sarah Grand and Mona Caird's relative positions on thematics of health and the role of fiction see Angelique Richardson, 'Allopathic Pills ? Health, Fitness and New Woman Fictions' *Woman: A Cultural Review* Spring 1999: 1-21.
- ⁹⁹ For interesting discussion of the New Woman's relationship to the male Aesthete see Sally Ledger (1997).
- ¹⁰⁰ Hugh E.M Stutfield, *Blackwood's Magazine*, vol. 157 (June 1895): 834-845.
- ¹⁰¹ *Shafts* (Feb.1894) : 206.
- ¹⁰² Ibid: 206.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid: 206.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid: 206.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid: 206.
- ¹⁰⁶ Part of this discourse is a series in *Shafts* called 'Shakespeare's Ideal of Woman', where male literary and cultural values continue to be questioned. "Shakespeare", instead of acting as a standard of literary greatness or genius, is situated within "the horrors of his time"(*Shafts* 2:5 July 1893:92) in which the writer finds he "sits contentedly [...] without a word of comment" in failing to question Elizabethan injustice and brutalities he is found to hold an unacceptably uncritical, objective stance. "Shakespeare", rather than being saluted as a classic writer of English literature is found to belong to his own especially degenerate era. As Ann Ardis has demonstrated, in this period – particularly after Oscar Wilde's trial in 1895 – the ideological uses to which "Shakespeare" was put in order to contest or to support the treatment of sexuality in English fiction and the notion of Englishness varied enormously. Instead of functioning as an icon of English culture here, the reviewer finds that Shakespeare's sexual candour reaches to "licentious words and deeds", with passages "so coarse we decline to quote them". This objection in part derives from the expression of homosexuality and the way in which it is seen to effeminise English masculinity. For treatment of the changing representation of "Shakespeare" see Ann Ardis ' "Shakespeare and Mrs Grundy: Redefining Literary Value in the 1890s', *Transforming Genres: New Approaches to British Fiction of the 1890s*. Eds. N.L. Manos and M. J. Rochelson (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994):1-16.
- ¹⁰⁷ 'The Tree of Knowledge', *New Review* 10:61 (June 1894).
- ¹⁰⁸ "Aurora", 'Between the Lights', *Signal* (June, 1894): 412.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid: 412.

¹¹⁰ Lady Susan Mary Elizabeth Jeune, 'The Revolt of the Daughters', *Fortnightly Review* 55 (1 March 1894): 267-276.

¹¹¹ Ibid: 268.

¹¹² Ibid: 269.

¹¹³ Ibid: 269.

¹¹⁴ Ibid: 269.

¹¹⁵ Emile Zola, 'Le Roman Expérimental', *Le Roman Expérimental* (1880), *Documents of Literary Realism*. Ed. George J. Becker (Princeton New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973): 162-196.

¹¹⁶ *Signal* 2:36 (6 Sept.1894): 145.

¹¹⁷ Ibid: 145.

¹¹⁸ Ibid: 145.

¹¹⁹ Ibid: 146.

¹²⁰ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture 1830-1980* (London: Virago,1987).

¹²¹ *Woman's Signal* 3: 65 (28 March 1895): 193.

¹²² Ibid: 193.

¹²³ Ibid: 193.

¹²⁴ 'Sexual Physiology & Hygiene' (Glasgow, 1864; 1891). The paper ran adverts for Allinson's brown bread. Although now an innocuous household name in Britain, as a vegetarian baker of wholemeal bread, the founder was a subversive who also wrote hygienic literature advocating birth control.

¹²⁵ *Hygienic Advertiser*, later the *Hygienic Adviser* [1891-1893] no.10 (March 1892): 13.

¹²⁶ Ibid: 16.

¹²⁷ For example, Hardy's, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1895), George Moore's, *Esther Waters* (1894), Henrik Ibsen's, *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Hedder Gabler* (1890), and Bjørnstjerne M. Bjørnson's, *The Heritage of the Kurts* (1884).

¹²⁸ *Shafts* 4:2 (Feb.1896): 12.

¹²⁹ *Shafts* 3:2 (May 1895): 23-24.

¹³⁰ *Shafts* 3:1 (April 1895): 5.

¹³¹ Virginia Woolf, 'Women and Fiction', *Forum* (March 1929) *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*. Ed. Deborah Cameron (London: Routledge, 1990): 39.

¹³² *Shafts* 2: 5 (July 1893): 92.

¹³³ See for example, *Athenaeum* 3412 (18 March 1893): 342. *Lippincott's Magazine* 52 (1893): 637-640.

¹³⁴ *Shafts* 2: 5 (July 1893): 92.

¹³⁵ Ibid: 92.

¹³⁶ Ibid: 92.

¹³⁷ See Ann Heilmann, '(Un)Masking Desire: Cross dressing and the Crisis of Gender in New Woman Fiction', *Journal of Victorian Culture* 5:1 (Spring 2000): 83-111.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Norman Brady, *Shafts* (1978): 92.

¹⁴⁰ Emma Frances Brooke, *Life the Accuser* (London: William Heinemann, 1896): 105.

¹⁴¹ *Shafts* (Feb.1897): 47.

¹⁴² Op.cit. 47.

¹⁴³ Ibid: 47.

¹⁴⁴ See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production. Essays on Art and Literature* (1983; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

¹⁴⁵ Emma Frances Brooke, *The Superfluous Woman* (London: William Heinemann, 1894).

¹⁴⁶ *Woman's Signal* (14 March 1894).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ For an insightful discussion of this novel see Ledger (1997).

¹⁴⁹ Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First Wave Feminism* (London: Macmillan 2000): 89.

¹⁵⁰ Brooke's novel, *Transition* (1895) also develops and expounds socialist ideas about class and female emancipation.

Chapter 2

“The Romance of Race”: Grant Allen’s science as cultural capital

Grant Allen’s (1848 -1899) significance as a cultural commentator on fin-de-siècle gender politics has until very recently, been critically neglected, or confined to references to his controversial 1895 novella, *The Woman Who Did*.¹ Grant Blairfindie Allen was born in 1848 in Ontario, Canada, of Irish and French extraction; his national identity was integral to his political and cultural attitudes and he would increasingly foreground his “racial” identity as a Celt. The success of his writing career lay in being a populariser of evolutionary and sociological thought in a prolific output of chatty but informed articles on natural history, culture and travel, published in the periodical press such as the *Fortnightly* and *Westminster Review* as well as the *Cornhill* and *Popular Science Monthly*. He also published fiction widely, serially and in triple-deckers on themes of crime, heredity and atavism, imperial adventure and romance.

It is my aim to consider Grant Allen’s writing within an analysis of the late Victorian ideological construction of literary value following Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital, through discussion of Allen’s economic practices positioned dialectically with those of New Woman writers and the Woman Question. I shall suggest the ways in which ethics and aesthetics were bound up in contemporary fiction, and how his position-taking negotiates the divided literary field produced through formations of genre and their relationship to gender. Allen’s specific strategies to produce difference negotiate the terms of “romance” and “realism” within perceptions of literary value, and their association with gendered producers and

consumers. Thus the modalities which he adopts are split, sometimes contradictory, suggesting a dynamic in which dispositions are structured along broken trajectories. I will continue by addressing the dialectic with the New Woman in which Allen situated himself, and in which critics positioned him, through the development of his eugenic ideas and their relationship to his attack on the New Woman.

His allegiances with New Woman politics were closely scrutinised by feminist commentators and critics; Allen claimed a solidarity which was essentially false, a tactic which infuriated feminists of various political identities. The Central National Society of Women's Suffrage announced in the *Woman's Penny Paper* in 1890 that "Mr Grant Allen has become a member",² it was a hollow gesture on Allen's part; Millicent Garrett Fawcett had claimed in her review in the *Contemporary Review* in 1895, that "Mr Grant Allen has never given help by tongue or pen to any practical effort to improve the legal or social status of women".³ This chapter will examine his presentation of science, *firstly in the context of publication for the popular market*, then secondly with examination of his presentation of eugenics in his essays for the periodical press and his novels, with particular attention to the integral role of women in his treatment of biological responsibility and sexual maternity.

Peter Morton in *The Vital Science: Biology and the Literary Imagination, 1860–1900* has commented on how Allen's proximity to scientific and literary circles and his engagement with popular and current thinking for the market place make his attitudes to eugenics important. But Morton does not associate Allen's eugenicism with the Woman Question, he attributes to Allen alone the vision of an "Amazonian cult of motherhood" instead of situating it within a matrix of contemporary debates on

femininity.⁴ In a more recent essay, in reclaiming Allen from obscurity Morton has championed him as a liberal of his day; he suggests that he was liked by most of literary London,⁵ failing to consider the less friendly relationship he enjoyed with some of his female colleagues. In my discussion of Allen's short stories I will explore the contentious claim that "[h]is views on racial differences would make most cringe today but in some aspects are advanced for his time. At the very least, his heart is in the right place".⁶

The only full-length critical study of Allen is Barbara Arnett Melchiori's *Grant Allen: The Downward Path that Leads to Fiction* (2000). Published a hundred years later than the last book on Allen, Edward Clodd's biography, *Grant Allen, A Memoir* (1900), Melchiori reassesses Allen for the twenty-first century, finding, and approving, in his cultural politics and scientific ideas strong resonances with our own: a position which raises some ethical and ideological problems considering Allen's misogyny, racism and eugenicism. Melchiori's idealistic assessment that "all his novels are concerned with teaching men and women to live together in harmony"⁷ is simplistic; his novels certainly were didactic, but the ideological foundation of this harmony was rigidly prescriptive of what were essentially, conservative gender roles.

Melchiori diffuses or fails to address the menaces of Allen's advocacy of eugenics instead finding it modern and prophetic (looking forward to test-tube babies and artificial insemination), claims that his "approach to science" on the subject of selective breeding is typically "sensible" and "pragmatic",⁸ and overlooks the eugenic themes and plots of so much of his fiction, for example in her discussion of *The Woman Who Did* or *What's Bred in the Bone*. Feminist scholarship⁹ on the New

Woman has made some reference to Allen's eugenics and enables a better understanding of his relationship to the Woman Question; and recent academic interest in Allen at a centenary conference¹⁰ has made it impossible to understand his creed without contextualising it firmly within the range of feminist positions in this period.

The question of cultural production and consumption in the late nineteenth-century literary market is often taken by its contemporary commentators to reflect the health of the nation, voicing anxieties about the consuming and consumed bodies of an imperial Britain in decline. The canons of cultural legitimacy were being reappraised, with "realism" and "romance" undergoing a process of redefinition which contested the association of gender with genre, and their respective forms of capital. In the distribution of power in the formation of fields, science was an important factor in producing and negotiating cultural capital, and I will suggest the ways in which Grant Allen deployed heredity and eugenics in particular. The structure of the field shaped by the constraints imposed by publishers and their "readers" *necessitate different* strategies in this interaction. The construction of an authorial identity or voice which negotiates the commercial with the authentic, in both literature and in scientific writing, characterises his work.

Bourdieu has characterised the literary field as a field of struggles driven by conflict between actors staking out their territory and competing for cultural legitimacy. Bourdieu omits the role that gender plays from this theory, but his thinking on these areas is illuminating for such a discussion, and will be relevant to our treatment of Grant Allen in relation to New Woman fiction. Within such a literary subfield, Allen was published in John Lane's *Keynote Series* with a number of writers

also associated with Lane and Harland's *Yellow Book*. His more radical fictions, *The Woman Who Did* (1895) – which ran to nineteen editions in its first year of publication¹¹ – *The British Barbarians* (1895) and *A Splendid Sin* (1896) drew on the space created for franker discussion of sexual issues achieved not only by the French naturalist writers, and realist male writers in this period, like Thomas Hardy, George Gissing and George Meredith, but by New Women such as Sarah Grand, M^{lle} Muriel Dowse and Emma Brooke; the latter two women he had correspondence with.¹²

When Hardy had attempted to distance his novel *Jude the Obscure* (1895) from being classified with New Woman fiction,¹³ his efforts reveal his distaste at being classified with the popular or “entrepreneurial” text frequently derided as feminine, as if his text would be tainted by the more didactic flavour of these products. Although Allen did not seek to publicly disavow his interest in the Woman Question, he too produced distinctions with which he aimed at distinguishing his enterprise from that of the New Women, and his position taking is symptomatic of the shifts in the literary market place effected by the perceived, and actual presence of New Women writing.

The modalities which Allen adopts in the literary field are essentially split, but consist of well developed position-takings in relation to current and long running debates on aesthetics and ethics. Alternating between announcing himself first as an amateur impostor, turning out “pot-boilers” to scratch a living, and then as a misunderstood intellectual and poet transcending the vulgarity of the economic demands of the marketplace, he deployed various more or less conscious strategies with which to articulate an identity as cultural producer and commentator. To enjoy claims to cultural legitimacy, his position-taking required his recognition by peers, and

involved a negotiation of, or a capitalising on common cultural references and discourses. Allen enjoyed a proximity to Darwinian scientific circles, even unto patronage by Darwin himself,¹⁴ in which he was exposed to, and contributed to dialogue on the latest developments and discoveries in biological, psychological and anthropological theory.

Work on the philosophy of science and physics such as *Physiological Aesthetics* (1877) and the monograph *Force and Energy, A Theory of Dynamics* (1888) was judged as unoriginal by his peers, scientists such as Karl Pearson;¹⁵ Allen's success, and livelihood, lay in the many essays he wrote for the periodical press on a multitude of subjects in evolutionary sciences, travel and literary culture. He was well aware of both the cultural and economic capital with which his knowledge and utilisation of evolutionary biology endowed his literary production and accordingly his background lent his later disquisitions on the woman question, an authority and professional expertise. Not wishing to expend or endanger his symbolic capital – the reputation he had built up within the scientific community as an evolutionary naturalist, however minor – he had published his earlier works of fiction under several pseudonyms.¹⁶ When Allen won a prize of £1000 for his novel *What's Bred in the Bone* (1891), awarded by its publisher *Titbits*, the book carried a facsimile of his signature on the front cover, suggesting that his was a house-hold name by this time. Even such sensational concoctions, when they were presented by a known scientific commentator, were ensured success in a market in which readers responded to the intrigues and mysteries surrounding notions of hereditary memory.

Allen sets up a divide in his fiction, which relegates one form, the pot-boilers, to the field of mass-market literature, which is inauthentic to the artist's ideals and compromises his beliefs and artistic integrity, and the other, the "Hill-top Novels", which include *Philistia* (1884), *The British Barbarians* (1895)¹⁷ and *The Woman Who Did* (1895) that are vehicles for expressing his own opinions in a higher, almost benevolent mission of intellectual enlightenment. The protest novel was, in popular cultural perception, associated with both female consumers and producers, although it was a popular mode for male and female writers alike.

Critics judged Allen harshly against his own standards. Both the suffragist feminist, Millicent Garrett Fawcett, and H. G. Wells' reviews of the novel focus on Allen's premise that by writing a novel to "satisfy his own taste and his own conscience" he would produce a great work of art. Fawcett examines Allen's boast that this purpose novel, unlike his potboilers will be written without deference to Mrs Grundy and *Philistia*, thus enabling him to produce a truthful and realistic picture and great literature.¹⁸ She wittily points out the novel's failings in its "melodramatic absurdities" and unrealistic and crude details both in the discontinuity in material details¹⁹ and in the depiction of a consistent and coherent identity recognisable to a feminist community. Even without the censorial restrictions of Victorian literary culture, Garret Fawcett finds Allen is not the great writer of works of abiding literary value that he claims he would be.

Wells' criticism in the *Saturday Review* also judges the merit of Allen's novel against its claims of artistic and political integrity in the face of the values of the marketplace; he reveals how the literary producer and his product are still

commodified: “here is the reliable sample, Grant Allen ‘wholly and solely’, Grant Allen warranted pure”,²⁰ he mocks the disparity in Allen’s rhetoric which cannot elide the marketplace. Wells makes the distinction between a purpose novel and a literary work, and what N. N. Feltes (1993) has identified as their respective “list” and “entrepreneurial” values in terms of cultural capital,²¹ is a polemic enterprise and not a work of art; he states that Allen “has written swiftly, hotly, with the indignation of years, and that is not the way to write books that will last”.²² As a measure of his best work – or as art – it fails to make the list; Wells condemns him for producing yet another “low” purpose novel marred by emotion, not executed with measured feeling. Wells’ criticism is consistent with Feltes’ analysis of phases of Victorian literary production which move from high, to late capitalism at the turn of the century, and the corresponding contemporary evaluations of cultural capital and literary value which increasingly conferred cultural recognition upon the realism.

Allen’s stance on artistic integrity was a familiar discourse in late-Victorian fiction, it pitted journalism or serial production against the artist and the novel, commodification and the dictates of the mass-market of literary production against the authentic expression of individuality, such as is explored in George Gissing’s *New Grub Street* (1891). This discourse is in part a lament against the censorship imposed by the publishers and monopolist lending libraries such as Mudie’s, whose strictures, as I have indicated in chapter 1, meant such control of production in order to render the novel suitable for the “Young Person” or the “British Matron”. Allen set out to inform young women, whom, deploying the patriarchal didacticism common to Mudie and his male detractors alike, he characterises as malleable, receptive readers. The

function of his Hill-top fiction, Allen explained, is to suggest ideas and to arouse emotions, particularly in impressionable female consumers: “[w]omen, in particular, are the chief readers of fiction, and it is women whom one mainly desires to arouse to interest in profound problems by the aid of this vehicle” (*TBB* 13). However some of these problems – marriage and sexual morality – were precisely in those areas which Mudie forbade discussion.

Because of his professed aim of a patriarchal mastering of the plastic feminine mind, writing in the preface to the Hill-top novels of the restrictions imposed by the publisher on the author in the literary market place, Allen foregrounds the function of fiction in producing a robustly masculine, imperial culture. To describe his aims in writing fiction he deploys a metaphor which pejoratively feminises the role of the cultural producer: “[w]hen I wished to purvey strong meat for men, I was condemned to provide milk for babes” (*TBB* 9). George Moore had used the same metaphor in his pamphlet *Literature at Nurse. Or, Circulating Morals* (1885); the act of breast-feeding becomes a negative troping on literary production; the inferior, compromised level at which the novelist under censorship is obliged to write has the same culture value as this degrading maternal act. Nursing – a female activity considered by the Victorian middle-class to be *too* “natural” to be civilised – is presented as an economic function and inflected with the attendant class and race identities; of course the activity of breast-feeding amongst the upper and middle classes was more often done by paid, working-class, or in a colonial context, black “native”, wet-nurses. If breast-feeding then, is synonymous with the exploitative labour of wet-nursing in which the nurse’s own baby is substituted by another’s, it parallels the substitution of the writer’s “real”

literary text with that of economic necessity. Anxieties about this feminisation and infantilisation of fiction, and the threat which this posed to a virile, British masculinity are also evident in the butcher/author analogy in a society where meat was associated with masculinity.²³

The same metaphor was also taken up in Eliza Lynn Linton's diatribe in 'Candour in English Fiction' in the *New Review* in 1890, in which literature is a nutriment sustenance acting as the cultural fortifier and consolidator of national hegemony. In her demand for a "specialised literature" she asks "[m]ust men go without meat because babes must be fed with milk? Or, because men must have meat, shall the babes be poisoned with food too strong for them to digest?"²⁴ Her analogy of cultural consumption is more explicitly informed by a dialectic with imperialism. Bemoaning the dearth of realistic fiction in England because of the way in which it is standardised for one reader under the monopolisation of the market by Mudie and W. H. Smith, Linton remarked upon the "queer anomaly of a strong-headed and masculine nation cherishing a feeble, futile, milk-and-water literature – of a truthful and straightforward race accepting the most transparent humbug as a picture of human life".²⁵ This infantilisation of the State when the health of the body of the nation appeared to be failing, linking the strength of the race with its national culture, can be seen in the light of competition for imperialist powers. The urgent task of imparting realism to contemporary literature in Britain was informed by opposition to the movement in French Naturalist fiction, a disavowal of an influence which had opened up questions of the representation of sex and marital relations in fiction, as I have suggested in chapter 1. This consolidation of a popular cultural form was imagined as

building the resistance and defences of the national body against contamination by foreign invasion/penetration. We might see Allen's stance then as a position-taking which, while it welcomes a more candid representation of sexual morality and marriage, at the same time guards against contamination by unhealthy decadence.

The crusading didacticism of Allen's fiction drew strongly on the prevailing cultural signifiers especially prominent in contemporary literary fields, of purity. A key trope in debates on social and moral degeneration, purity fused "race", nation and sexuality; constructs of regenerative purity in culture and morals varied widely as opposing groups sought to invest it with their own values. An outline of concerns over purity and contamination here will highlight two aspects of purity shared with New Woman fiction – the role of environmental and biological factors for health, both invested with moral dimensions – and their representation in Allen's fiction will then be treated. The demands of masculinity made by social-purity feminists, as discussion of the women's periodicals has shown, involved *highlighting the sexual double-standard* in the Victorian marriage market, and by continuing to value purity for women, feminists sought to reinstate the value of chastity for men.

George Robb in an essay on eugenicism in paradigms of Victorian sexual morality has contrasted the "moral eugenics" of social-purity feminism with the "progressive" eugenics of iconoclastic writers like H. G. Wells, Henry Havelock Ellis and G. B. Shaw – a group in which he includes Grant Allen – who "sought to liberate the body and spirit from the stifling confines of bourgeois prudery".²⁶ I suggest that whilst Allen cannot be straightforwardly associated with the ideas of this group, he

shared their emphasis on maternity as the means to the restructuring of Victorian sexual morality expounded in the nationalist eugenics of Karl Pearson.

“Moral” eugenic discourse had of course become a crucial strand emerging from the campaigns of the social purity feminists against the Contagious Diseases Acts.

This was in part precipitated by a shift in the understanding of disease fostered by evolutionary biology – most crucially through August Weismann’s theory of the transmission of the germ-plasm – from the individual body as carrier of disease to the intergenerational ability of diseases like syphilis to be transmitted via the heredity of the body through the germ-cell, or primary unit of heredity.²⁷ With the individual’s ineluctable heredity becoming a new locus for disease, for purity feminists then, contamination could be located within the male body and men held at fault for the health of the social body, as they were taken to task for their responsibility in the spread of disease and for a hypocritical morality.

We see New Woman and other contemporary writers’ works then, incorporate both contemporary and more ancient models of contamination/disease with which to produce ideas of purity and the healthy body. The effect of the environment – the social infrastructure and the “natural” surroundings – both on the quality of life for the individual and its impact on heredity, could not be discounted. The dichotomising of spatial tropes in which the city is demonised, the countryside (usually genteel, sometimes rural labour) idealised – imagery increasingly prevalent since the industrial novels of the 1840s – recur in many eugenic fictions of the field, from Emma Frances Brooke’s *The Superfluous Woman*, discussed in chapter 1, to Sarah Grand’s *Our Manifold Nature* (1894) and Grant Allen’s *The British Barbarians*. Eugenicists,

socialists and feminists identified environmental or biological factors like heredity as primary pathological agents in their concerns with health and disease, many like, Allen, combined the representation of both in their fiction.

Laura Otis in *Membranes* (1998) elaborates the historical opposition of a miasmatic theory of disease (one spread by environmental factors) versus a contagionist theory of contamination (disease spread from one individual's body to another); she argues that germ theory replaced miasma theory in the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁸ In the late nineteenth-century, knowledge of Weismann's theory of the transmission of the germ-plasm was quite widespread, but it was not fully understood or accepted, literary narratives of health and hygiene did not wholly displace more diffuse notions of contamination. Liberal and radical writers continued to draw on older miasmatic imagery with which to express their concerns for health and environment and infectious bodies in combination with the newer theories of heredity.

These discourses of health, fitness and purity combining moral counsel with stylistic or formal concerns can be seen as an effect of these writers' economic practices, constructing how their work is positioned in the field, and the cultural capital its producers aim to accrue. Writing which was seen as a subtly acting medicine or tonic – rather than strident polemic or moralising edification – published in the appropriate cultural canons, attained to a greater social prestige and literary merit. So when Allen asserted in 1899, at the end of his life, that “[s]low half-hints in the acknowledged organs of thought do far more good in the end. I have never believed in fighting; I believe in permeation”,²⁹ it was a typical gesture of self-

contradiction on his literary career, a disavowal of the pedantic pedagogy of his style. Although he claimed that his writing acted like the process of osmosis, a diffusion of ideas from a body of text to the body of the reader – a gradualist paradigm associated with greater symbolic capital – in his attacks on the body of the social establishment as well as on feminism his style was rather more combative.

In his trademark Hilltop novels Grant Allen claimed to be writing under the auspices of free, radical, self-expression, with blatant disregard for Mrs Grundy and the Philistines. His classification of his novel, *The British Barbarians* as one such identifies it as “a protest in favour of purity” written to oppose a literary marketplace “flooded with stories of evil tendencies” (*TBB* 3). Through the perspectives of an outsider the novel inverts the usual constructs of the antonyms of barbarity and civilisation, as the title suggests; the Alien, Bertram Ingledew is a visitor and anthropologist from the future, a device of a science-fiction being developed at this time such as in the American Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888) and William Morris’s *News From Nowhere* (1891). The Alien, as well as flouting laws on land-ownership, questions the social manners and mores of the late Victorian middle-classes, including its “taboos” on marriage, persuading the aptly named Frida to leave her passionless marriage for the personal integrity and freedom of his own civilised free-love.

The Hill-top Trade-Mark, as Allen significantly entitled it, would serve to differentiate this product from his other more compromised or less confrontational fiction; instead of satisfying editors, these stories, he claims: “I write of my own accord, simply and solely for the sake of embodying and enforcing my own opinions”

(*TBB* 8) – the surtitle would signal its having been written in the spirit of open expression and unrestrained artistic freedom. By dispensing morality, proclaiming his concern with ethical issues, Allen poses in this economy with the offer of a gift. It is an offer to dispense enlightening morality, albeit provocative, amongst the reading public, for which he claims not to expect remuneration, yet which he might actually accrue in cultural capital in the form of an avant-garde or radical reputation as he did with the scandal of *The Woman Who Did*.

The hill-top is, significantly, a figure of civil fortification, and Allen had made it the subject of an earlier article, ‘A Hill-top Stronghold’(1889) which considers the origins and reasons for the erection of a hill-top stronghold and its place in European history. Allen traces the origin of the hill-top city of Fiesole in Tuscany to Roman Britain – or rather, as he specifies, England – as the country for the “beginning of almost every great historical European Town”,³⁰ making reference to the prehistoric earthworks in Dorset and Devon, a subject of anthropological interest at this time to Hardy and many other writers.³¹ Allen’s reference to the hill-top encampment as a “kraal”, the Dutch Afrikaner word for “homestead”, is one which has racial, imperialist connotations; it is a figure that the Oxford Dictionary of English defines as “the restriction or separation of people into a particular area or groups”.³² Allen’s identification of the “kraal” with his literary project makes apparent his concerns about national health and civic defence, both domestic or civil and inter-national, and their relationship to literature.

Topographically in an elevated position at the heather-clad hill-top of Hindhead in Surrey, where Allen, like other writers, lived,³³ and had built “The Croft”,

a cottage for his family to live in. The author describes himself as enjoying a wholesome prospect above the moral, spiritual and physical decay emanating from the urban environment with its “foul air and lurid light” (*TBB* 17) Allen’s prurient cityscape is a “tinsel Arcadia” wherein “garish gas-lamps” light scenes of “feverish joys” between “decadents” and “heart-sick [...] painted goddesses” (*TBB* 18). The sensational picture of “dancing saloon[s]” and “stifling miasma of the gambling hell [sic]” (*TBB* 20) is not dissimilar to ones in New Woman fiction (rather than the more nuanced balance of George Moore, for example)³⁴ in which condemnation of the dissolute pleasures of gambling, drinking, and prostitution in the cities featured prominently, voicing growing concerns about the effects of the environment of an urban lifestyle on the fitness of the individual.³⁵

The fetid and stagnant miasma of the metropolis, the “squalid village” (*TBB* 21) with its “strange decadent sins and morbid pleasures” (*TBB* 17) is contrasted with the refined air of the hill-tops; Allen effuses in a scientific language to romanticise this purity:

[t]he oxygen of the hill-tops is purer, keener, rarer, more ethereal. [...] ozone stands to common oxygen itself as the clean-cut metal to the dull and leaden exposed surface. Nascent and ever renascent, it has electrical attraction; it leaps to the embrace of the atom it selects, but only under the influence of powerful affinities; and what it clasps once, it clasps for ever (*TBB* 19).

Articulated from a socially privileged position, it is a distinctively moral high ground where the ozone enjoyed by the dwellers at the “airy peaks” becomes an elixir of almost magical properties, it is “purity and life and sympathy and vigour”(TBB 20).

Another facet of purity to which Allen addressed himself in fiction was the question of “racial” purity and in this we see him aiming to reconfigure the romance. In his first collected sensational short stories, with the elements of science he attempted alchemically to transform the base metal of popular, sensational fiction into a more literary gold. In the intellectual field of science, Allen was on the side of the orthodox, and in maintaining his status as a serious truth-seeker, he often attacked what he saw as the more dubious, unorthodox facets of science. His first literary intervention was in origin a critique of the mysticism, spiritualism and the supernaturalism in the romance; his first story in *Belgravia*, ‘Our Scientific Observations on a Ghost’ (1878)³⁶ a satire on the existence of ghosts, started out, he claimed, as an argument in a scientific article, which he then “threw into narrative form”.³⁷ But this transfer of science into the romance and sensation fiction of mass culture also enabled him to negotiate these popular but derided literary genres, equated with the feminine, with the realism of the spirit of scientific enquiry.

The escapism in the fantasy elements of the popular romance, as Rita Felski has argued of “kitsch” in the late nineteenth century, were perceived as regressive, “in a personal as well as a historical sense, catering to an infantile desire to flee from the complexities of reality into a predictable fantasy world”;³⁸ Allen aimed to force the reader of fantasy to confront reality, and its attendant ethical responsibilities. This is evident in the way in which the values of sentimentality and emotional sensibility in

the romance are challenged by bringing the principles of sexual attraction in line with the modern interest of interracial relationships in a colonial context, and into the rubric of eugenicism.

In the preface to *Strange Stories* (1884) which contained a collection of stories all formerly published under the pseudonym of J. Arbuthnot Wilson, Allen consolidated their intellectual totality through asserting a new, open, authorial identity, that of Grant Allen, evolutionary naturalist. He self-consciously constructs his economic practice as an illegitimate venture into others' territory, mapping a metaphor of colonialism over the "fields" in the literary market. With a characteristic gesture of apparent self-deprecation he apologises to

the regular story tellers for an otherwise unwarrantable intrusion upon their private preserves. I trust they will forgive me in this plead for my trespass on their legitimate domains and allow me to occupy in peace a little adjacent corner of unclaimed territory which lie so temptingly close beside my own small original freehold.³⁹

Made from an authoritative position in a superior field of intellectual endeavour, his tone is thus of course far from being genuinely submissive. The claim that his literary intervention in the field is "original" and on "unclaimed territory" is anything but deferential. The question of legitimacy, who merits a place in the field and why, is subject to change; as his popularity grew as a fiction writer the pose of the non-

intrusive, deferential and peaceful colonist is considerably modified, and Allen often took a more confident position of belonging in relation to the historicity of the field.

Bourdieu states that creating difference – such as Allen in his occupation of “unclaimed territory” – effects a distance in literary production; it is this position taking of distance which precipitates futurity in the historicity of the field. I am not suggesting an exalted place for Allen in literary history, but rather aim to understand his own discourse as a claim to precipitate futurity. So actors seeking greater cultural capital may aim at an avant-garde position, differentiating their writing from others in a shared field; Allen laid claim to literary innovation through emphasising the importance of his supposedly radical ideological content, and in terms of generic changes as an effect of the cultural capital of his scientific knowledge. In commenting on the history of the field, his claims of difference aim to distinguish his work from that of New Woman writers as I will discuss below.

His biographer remarked that Allen saw all fiction in terms of the allotropic principles of chemistry: “[h]e used to say that on two plots hang ‘all the law and prophets’ in storytelling. A loves B; B loves A. Hence smoothsailing. A loves B; B loves C. Hence complications.”⁴⁰ However, Allen’s plots suggest that the attractions in his romances owe more to the interpretation and deployment of popular evolutionary psychological and biological theories – the formation, action and structure of heredity as memory, the accumulated inheritance of progenitors memories, habits and character along Lamarckian mechanisms of inheritance and the stimulation by environment in reactivating atavistic patterns of behaviour. The possibility of regeneration, biological

or social, intimately linked in his narratives, is often thwarted as is germane to the resolution of a sensational story.

Miscegenation, or inter-racial marriage, had long been a subject of the novel, but Allen claimed to have discovered a new generic form: “I launched out upon what I venture to think was the first voyage ever made in our time into the Romance of the Clash of Races – since so much exploited”.⁴¹ These romances endeavoured to fuse scientific problems with literary forms, and eugenics was at its heart. Allen’s voyage coincides with the way in which Francis Galton, who had himself penned both novels and poetry, wished to see the biometric calculations of eugenics wrought into literary forms. In his notebook on the origin of varieties, Galton attempted to statistically plot levels of attraction between different races.

Moving between animals, the human to plants and back to the human in his theorisation of hybridity, he blends the language of the cultural constructs of humanity – “caste”, “tribe”, “marriage” – with that of other species, so that the registers of plant and animal biology and human anthropology are mixed:

[i]t has long seemed to me that the primary characteristic of a separate ~~variety should~~
~~be looked for~~ [resides] in the fact that the individuals who compose it do not ~~care~~ as a
 rule care to mate with those [who are outside its pale, but form through their own
 inclination a caste to themselves;] ~~of another variety and therefore~~ that each variety is
 [probably] rounded off from ~~its neighbours~~ [out of the middle of the parent stock] by
 [means of several] peculiarities of sexual instinct which prompt [what anthropologists

call] endogamy, [~~or supposed~~ a marriage within their tribe] and which check exogamy [or marriage with outsiders].⁴²

In the next paragraph, the type of varieties under discussion are revealed to be human “stock”, and the differences discussed are “racial”; Galton directly applied “laws” from the plant world to the human. Bemoaning the state of the novel in culture for its treatment of the sexual instinct, Galton outlines an area of enquiry which would reform the novel and poetry:

[n]o theme is more trite than that of the sexual instinct. It forms the principal subject of each of the many hundreds [I believe about 800] novels, and of most of the [the still more numerous] poems that are annually written in England alone, but one of its main peculiarities has never so far as I know, been even yet clearly set forth. It is the relation that exists between *different degrees of contrast and* different degrees of sexual attractiveness. ~~When the fem~~ The male is little [if at all] attracted by close similarity. The attraction rapidly increases as the difference in any given respect between the female and the male increases, but only to a certain point. When this is passed, the attraction again wanes until zero is reached. When the diversity is still greater the attraction becomes negative and lapses in to [a] repugnance, such as most fair complexioned men ~~might~~ [appear to] feel to a ~~woman of a negro tint~~ [towards a negress].⁴³

In this account of the degrees of attraction in sexual instinct, difference is conceived of in terms of race; the subject is miscegenation. Galton amends his language to stress the degree of difference between the male and female to emphasise both sexual and racial difference, so that the dark-skinned woman becomes more absolutely a cultural or racial Other: a “negress”. Galton’s wish for a eugenic literature would be met with by proponents of the New Woman fiction, such as Grand and Egerton, as Angelique Richardson has detailed.⁴⁴ But in its attention to racial difference, it was pursued perhaps most incessantly, and didactically, by Allen; the romantic protagonists in his short stories are almost always of different nationality, “race” or religious creed.

Both diffusing the stigma of the surrogacy of his hack or piece work and the “low” form of the romance, Allen lays claim to the weighty cultural capital of scientific knowledge: “I ventured for the better development of my subject to throw the argument into the form of a narrative. I didn’t regard this narrative as a story: I looked upon it merely as a convenient method of displaying scientific truth.”⁴⁵ The collection published in 1884, *Strange Stories*, which were first published in the *Belgravia* and other periodicals, and were reissued with additional stories as *Twelve Tales* in 1899,⁴⁶ is dominated by the themes of hereditary ancestral memory, atavism, recidivism and miscegenation.

In common with other contemporary thinkers on “race”, as I will discuss at greater length in chapter 7, Allen held that a degree of exogamy was beneficial to the race, and suggested that races are essentially hybrid, although this was, crucially, restricted to “ethnological diversity” of European ancestry among white Europeans, for example. This shared genealogy of universal structures and motives is detailed in

Allen's *Cornhill* article, 'The Romance Of Race'(1897), which philological discussion asserts the impossibility of a pure racial identity. His anthropological perspectives were developed through his close friendship with Edward Clodd, and through his study of works like James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890). However, his tales still resonate with anxiety about the proximity of that kinship, sensationalised in the outbreak of atavism, or the repression of natural instincts, which disrupt individual, class, gender and race identities.

In the story 'Mr Chung' (1882) a Chinese civil servant working in London falls in love with an English girl, Effie; she likes listening to his silvery voice and educated manners but can only tolerate his love-making by keeping her eyes closed, thus not "seeing" his "race". Effie knows that she cannot marry him; this feeling, the author reasons, is the fundamental repulsion which belongs to the evolutionary instinct, the impulse to "check exogamy" which Galton suggests in his notes: "[b]ut a Chinaman! Reason about the prejudice as you like, there it is, a thing not to be got over, and at bottom so real that even the very notion of getting over it is terribly repugnant to our natural instinct"(SS 61). Rejected by Effie, on his return to Peking, Chung is executed for his efforts at Westernisation; Allen is clear that although Chung's death is sad and regrettable, such a union would be impossible: "[a]n English girl could not conceivably marry a Chinaman"(SS 65).

'Carvalho' is the only story which treats interracial marriage sympathetically, partly because Ernest Carvalho's "race" is not "visible": his "mixed blood" is not apparent in his skin colour. It also illustrates the contemporary belief in anthropology that a certain degree of ethnical hybridity contributed to vitality and intelligence, to

which Allen subscribed – “[i]t is a truism now to say that ‘there is no such thing as a pure race’”.⁴⁷ Carvalho is very clever and learned, but has had no formal education; his mixed race ancestry is given to account for his intelligence:

On my father’s side I am Jewish, though of course the Jews acknowledge nobody who isn’t a pure-blooded descendant of Abraham in both lines; and for that reason I have been brought up a Christian. On my mother’s side I am partly negro, partly English, partly Haitian French and, through the Sloanes, partly Dutch as well. So you see I am a very fair mixture (SS 218).

Thus the romance, in which Carvalho as a successful writer in England marries the white heroine, safely enacts the cathartic reconciliation of the wealthy colonial with her family’s slave owning past.

‘The Reverend John Creedy’ perhaps illustrates best Allen’s lurid treatment of theories of reversion to atavistic behaviours. Despite its sensationalism, Allen nevertheless claimed that his story not only confirmed scholarly anthropological work, describing the eponymous character as “well known to all students of modern anthropological papers and reports”, but that as a product of the author’s expert knowledge as a white ex-colonial, it was approaching psychological realism:

[t]he tale which I have based upon several such historical instances in real life endeavours briefly to hint at the modes of feeling likely to accompany such a relapse into barbarism in an essentially fine and sensitive savage nature [...] those

who know intimately the whole gamut of the intensely impressionable African mind will be able to treat its temptations and its tendencies far more sympathetically.⁴⁸

A black West African man who has trained to be a reverend and a missionary at Magdalene College, Oxford, mistakenly takes his new, white wife to work in Africa with him. The plot illustrates brain theories that exposure to a particular environment can stimulate behavioural patterns hidden to the conscious mind, triggering ancestral memory. Back at his home village at Butabué on missionary work, John Creedy reverts to his native ways; his Fantee language, long suppressed, comes back to him, and he starts dancing a hornpipe and drinking rum in the streets, where his wife sees him drumming the tom-toms, with traumatic consequences: “[y]es, instinct had gained the day over civilisation; the savage in John Creedy had broken out; he had torn off his English clothes and, in West African parlance, ‘had gone Fantee’ ”(SS 16). His wife is also “contaminated” by her contact with Africa, she contracts yellow fever after the shock of this metamorphosis and dies. The dangerous consequences of miscegenation are spectacularly staged for the reader with a supposed foundation in scientific truth.

Michel Foucault argues that the period of the end of the nineteenth century sees a paradigm shift in forms of the will to power, with the emergence of self-regulation by the individual in relation to the management of supposedly hereditary disorders.⁴⁹ Thus the notion of biologico-moral responsibility was central to a libertarian eugenics which was opposed to “negative”, or prohibitory State legislation to promote eugenically sound marriages. The unconscious, hereditary memory theories expounded

by leading psychologists like Henry Maudsley in Britain, or more controversially by heterodox evolutionist, Samuel Butler, implied a loss of determination over individual behaviour through the resurfacing of ancestral traits, these problematised the question of agency and challenged the idea of free will, giving rise to discourses of self-regulation.

Grant Allen characterised the self as split: “every individual, especially in civilised countries, is a meeting place and battle-field for endless hostile and conflicting ancestors. Our idiosyncrasy depends in the end upon the proportion of each which comes out victor in the formation of our character.”⁵⁰ Such a construction of the evolutionary self was evident in Allen’s first published fiction, and he went on to develop such characterisations in his novels, in which discourses of self-regulation have increasing significance in the plot.

One such novel was Allen’s prize-winning *What’s Bred in the Bone (WBB)*⁵¹ published by the proprietor of *Tit-Bits* in 1891, it gained the large prize of £1000 for the best serial story. Perhaps its success was due to Allen’s canny eye on the market; it is a literary hybrid encompassing various genres, African adventure, crime, sensation, mystery, as well as romance, all which enjoyed a large, popular audience. Inheritance, concealed familial origins and identities have been staple themes for the novel throughout the nineteenth century; in this novel they become not only biologised, but eugenised.

Elma and Cyril are brought together as lovers after they become survivors of a train crash, both have secret genealogies, their experiences of which shape the novel and its marriage plot. There is the undisclosed paternal origins of twin brothers, and

the hereditary memory of a young woman, Elma, revived through a remarkable, pre-Freudian encounter with her lover's snake,⁵² which forms a disturbing catalyst in the passage to her adult subjectivity. Archetypically female, the authorial voice argues that it is Elma's natural instinct to intuit: "[t]hat's one of the many glorious advantages of being born a woman. You don't need to learn in order to know. You know instinctively. And yet our girls want to go to Girton, and train themselves to be senior wranglers!" (*WBB* 2) – that all the knowledge she needs is intuitive is typical of one of Allen's frequent derogatory allusions to "Girton Girls".

Notions of organic memory are in play here too, in particular that of experiences hereditarily transmitted by one's progenitors, revived through environmental stimulus. Latent, hereditary traits which are "primitive", especially sexual behaviours, resurface, threatening to expose Elma's gypsy ancestry. It transpires that brown-skinned Elma's great, great grandfather had married a Turkish snake charmer who was a hereditary fortune teller with great gifts of intuition: "this particular lady belonged to what you might call a caste of priestly family, as it were, of hereditary fortune tellers everyone of whose ancestors had been specially selected for generations for the work, till a kind of transmissible mesmeric habit got developed among them" (*WBB* 119).

This notion of alterity, an Oriental Otherness enables Allen to give an energetic picture of female autoeroticism. Unlike the performance fantasies of George Egerton's heroine in 'A Cross Line' (1893) which this erotically charged scene resembles,⁵³ this performance is not delighted in by its performer as representative of an enduring primeval instinct of the eternal wildness of woman – as it is in Egerton's story – but

accompanied by shame, and can only be resolved by marriage to her intended. In secret, Elma performs frenzied dancing with a feather boa meant as a surrogate for the snake of the snake-charming dance which the performance recapitulates:

[s]he was whirling around the room, now slow, now fast, but always with arms held out lissom, like a dancing-girl's [...] It was an instinct within her over which she had no control. Surely, surely she must be possessed. There was nothing for her to hold; nothing to tame and subdue; nothing to cling and writhe and give point to her movements. Oh! heavens, how horrible (*WBB* 71).

This feeble protestation meant to convey the confusion and guilt in the girl's mind, does little to dampen the excitement of this episode for the reader: "[s]ome dormant impulse of her race seemed to stir in her blood, with frantic leaps and bounds, at its first conscious awakening. She gave herself up to it wildly now."⁵⁴ Possessed by overwhelming sensual feelings, Elma concludes that she must be tainted by an hereditary madness, and rapidly vows chastity is the best option for her; yet only by confessing and embracing her experience, Allen reveals, will she reconcile and be able to resume the final stage in her development toward "civilised" adulthood. Here Allen participates in the pedagogical exhortations of psychologists like G. Stanley Hall, James Sully and Alexander Chamberlain on adolescence, discussed in chapter 6, who argued that in order to reach proper adulthood the adolescent had to pass through the recapitulatory stages of atavism which characterise our ontogeny to ensure stable mature identity.

The exorcism or interrogation of female sexuality directed toward conjugal and parental obligations is significant; both the young lovers are governed by a sense of moral duty not to marry, having assessed their eugenic fitness. Cyril Waring's uncertain origins are finally revealed to be noble, with the novel's closure he claims his birthright as the illegitimate first son of the Lord of the Manor. Cyril's descent – combined with his Bohemian identity as a painter – indicates to the reader that he is eugenically fit, and the couple finally marry having established their breeding credentials. Elma has finally received reassurance from female relatives that her snake-dancing experiences are a transitory stage:

[s]he didn't know, what any psychologist might at once have told her, that no one with the fatal taint of madness in her blood could ever have thought of that righteous self-denial. Such scruples have no place in the selfish insane temperament; they belong only to the highest and purest types of moral nature.⁵⁵

Unfortunately this reasoning rather undercuts Allen's libertarian eugenic ideas of self-regulation, because if only the highest types, and not degenerates, have the capacity to be self-disciplining about who they marry, then how will "positive" eugenics work? Although the novel addresses the eugenic marriage, its ostensible content was crime and adventure, and its success doubtless lay in a mixture of these generic elements all shot through with his "slight tinge of scientific or psychological import and meaning",⁵⁶ evidence of Allen's grasp of the popular market and his niche in it as a fictionaliser of evolutionary psychology.

The early interest Grant Allen had in his career in problematising the implications of negative eugenics policies was fictionalised in his short story 'The Child of the Phalanstery', first published in the *Belgravia* 1884 and reprinted the same year in the collection, *Strange Stories* (1884). Set in a state utopian community with eugenic policies, it signals Allen's initial opposition to social interventionist strategies through eugenic policies on reproduction advised by Francis Galton and the MP, Sir George Campbell. Yet his problematisation of these issues does not offer resolutions.

The rhetorical confidence of Allen's later pronouncements in the periodical press is absent here: its status as a science fiction story in a collection of sensational tales enables social and moral problematisation of eugenic theory strikingly different from the more dogmatic formulations of his journalistic pieces. Allen appears to satirise the policy of the community Hierarch: "[o]ur power of interference as a community I've always felt and said, should only extend to the prevention of obviously wrong and immoral acts, such as marriage with a person in ill health or of inferior mental power, or with a distinctly bad or insubordinate temper" ('CP' 305).

The phalanstery of the title has its etymological origin in the mid-nineteenth century in the utopian socialist, Fourier's notion of a co-operative community; the tale is a meditation on the question of disability in a utopian state, and the extent of State intervention in individual lives in the interests of the whole community. A baby with its feet turned inwards is born to the young couple, Clarence and Olive of the United Avondale Phalanstery. Physical Beauty, bodily fitness and health and its place in producing eugenically fit offspring was important to Allen's ideas, as we have seen.

Despite a union between two seemingly fit citizens, or in Allen's parlance, "two good marriageable units", a baby with its feet twisted inwards is born. It is a slight defect, she may be able to walk, but the hierarchs of the community decide that as a cripple she is an offence to aesthetic sensibility. The hierarch demands of her father: "[w]ould you have us bring up the dear child to lead a lingering life of misfortune, *to distress the eyes of all around her?*" (my italics, 'CP' 310). Infanticide features as a measure of civilisation and barbarism – a subject which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5. The baby is represented by the community elders as an unfortunate atavism of the earlier colonial civilisations, still dwelling at the Antipodes: "[y]ou have seen cripples, in those semi-civilised old colonial societies, which have lagged after us so slowly in the path of progress; and would you like your own daughter to grow up to such a life as that, Clarence?" ('CP' 310).

Her parents' distress at her ritual chloroforming (on "Darwin Day") is also considered as an emotional "throwback" to earlier sensibilities of a barbaric age. Civilisation advances apace of biological evolution; the sentiments of the parents are considered atavistically "uncivilised" in the light of the advanced socialistic principles of the Phalanstery. The misfit between the march of human civilisations and the pace of geological time creates an impasse, and Olive is left mourning for a return to a lost innocence, a romantic savagery where such difference would be tolerated:

[i]t was very wrong and anti cosmic she knew [...] but in her women's soul she felt she would rather be a miserable naked savage in a wattled hut, like those one saw in old books about Africa before the illumination, if only she could keep that

one little angel of a crippled baby than dwell among all the enlightenment and knowledge and art and perfected social arrangements of phalanasteric England without her child – her dear, helpless, beautiful baby ('CP' 314).

The role of mother, as childminder and nurse, is still the one designated appropriate to women in this community whether or not it is their own biological child that they nurse. The hierarch muses to himself: "I had rather hoped she would have joined the celibate sisters, and have taken nurse duty for the sick and the children. It's her natural function in life, the work she is best fitted for; and I should have liked to see her take to it" ('CP' 304). The maternal instinct, here identified with the "savage", which Allen so vociferously defended and expounded upon, is thwarted under this regime in which Olive consents to the ritual killing by chloroform of her infant. However, she succumbs to the fumes herself, and coupled with her distress, is killed at the same time. This disregard of what is presented as healthy, philoprogenitive feeling is abhorrent to Allen and is central to his notion of sexual maternity as guided naturally by eugenic impulse.

This story illustrates the evolutionary tenet of random mutation; the unpredictable outcome of offspring, and the time-scale in which such "benefits" would be seen. It is the element of Chance, "the blind workings of the unconscious Cosmos", whose negative and positive effects which disrupt the notion of a linear and smooth progress of evolution which interests Allen. However, I suggest that the 'Phalanstery' does not wholly satirise eugenics, as Patrick Parrinder in an article on eugenics and utopia has remarked.⁵⁷ It is the means and methods of bringing about a eugenic society

that are problematised in this story, but not the objective itself. Allen's views on eugenics altered substantially during his writing career, and this shift was explicitly connected to a developing antagonism toward the higher education of women.

Angelique Richardson, whilst confining her study of the language of health and fitness in New Woman fiction to female writers, notes that women were not alone in construction of a purpose or protest novel which eugenised the love plot: "the alliance between art and perceived morality was not exclusively feminine".⁵⁸ In discussion of the role of the eugenic plot in Sarah Grand's novels, Richardson has argued that "[f]or Grand the novel was essentially a patriarchal tool, responsible for (and irresponsibly) creating romantic love as a sickness of civilisation."⁵⁹ I suggest that the treatment of the novel by male writers, in particular, Grant Allen, did not identify the romantic novel, or loveplot as "dysgenic" in the same way as, for example, did Sarah Grand. Allen's eugenic fiction, by contrast, continued to celebrate romantic love in a way which other New Woman fiction did not. If for Grand, romance was diametrically opposed to eugenic matches, for Allen writing during the early 1880s, romance was essentially eugenic in its nature.

Allen eschews the traditional novel as romance plot ending with a marriage, in common with many New Woman novels, in favour of an exploration of an extra-marital affair and its consequences as a paean to "free love" unions in *The British Barbarians*, and in the same year, of a "free love union" in *The Woman Who Did*, and developed his treatment of love and fiction in his essays increasingly along specifically eugenic themes.

A chronological progression of the shifts in his attitudes toward the practicality and desirability of promoting and implementing of “negative” eugenics are evident in his writing for the periodical press. In an article of 1886, ‘Falling in Love’, Allen defends the novelist as an ally of nature, specifically, of the work of sexual selection. Falling in love, he argues, is the most highly evolved instinct of natural selection, which does not need the interference of ethical principles to manufacture higher types, but would weed out undesirables: “idiots, the consumptives, the weaklings, the cripples”.⁶⁰ If cultural intervention is needed in a natural process however, it is the novel which is earmarked for the continuing elevation of romantic love. He claims that the novelist,

always appeals to the true internal promptings of inherited instinct, and opposes the foolish and selfish suggestions of interested outsiders. [The novel] is the perpetual protest of poor banished human nature against the expelling pitchfork of calculating expediency in the matrimonial market [...] the romance-writer is for ever urging, on the other hand, ‘Marry for love, and for love only’. He has been the chief ally of sentiment and of nature [...]. He has preserved us from the hateful conventions of civilisation.⁶¹

Sentimentality and rebellion are allies in the quest for race improvement, and the evangelical novelist, exalting these qualities proves to be “the best friend of human improvement [...] His mission is to deliver the world from Dr. Johnson and Sir George Campbell”.⁶²

Allen angrily protested against these advocates of “negative” eugenics that “a man is not a horse or a terrier. You cannot inspect his ‘points’ by simple inspection”; he criticises the oft-repeated eugenic argument on selective breeding: “[l]ook at the analogy with domestic animals. That is the analogy to which breeding reformers always point with special pride: but what does it really teach us?”⁶³ His answer to this rhetorical question is that it teaches us very little; heredity is too unpredictable, and without difference there would be nothing for natural selection to act upon. He concludes that, “[i]mprovement cannot be made by ‘the creation of an independent moral sentiment’”.⁶⁴

Allen counters the prohibitive policies of Campbell, the MP and Governor of Bengal, which were based on measures which seek to increase the standard of human efficiency, with claims that we “naturally” make eugenically sound selections in our choice of mate, hence pre-empting the need for eugenic strictures or policies. His positive eugenics turns on the trumping of Nature over Culture, whilst reiterating a consistent construct of what are natural and artificial conditions and categories: “[w]hat folly to interfere with a marvellous instinct which now preserves this balance intact, in favour of an untried artificial system which would probably wreck it, as helplessly as the modern system of higher education is wrecking the maternal powers of the best class in our English community.”⁶⁵

However, four years later in 1890 in ‘The Girl of the Future’ in the *Universal Review*, Allen is promoting the notion of ethical compulsion as the chief engine of a “progressive”, “positive” eugenic artificial selection, a position which responds to the growing public interest in, and anxiety about, ensuring “racial” progress through

national fitness. Here, Allen, in a volte-face, even endorses the analogy made between human sexual unions based on selection, and the animal husbandry which he had criticised earlier: “to see how foolish is our practice in the reproduction of the human race, we have only to contrast it with the method we pursue in the reproduction of those other animals whose purity of blood, strength, and excellence has become of importance to us”.⁶⁶ He had joined the eugenists in their aims to escape the crude deceptions practiced by “sexual selection” in favour of an informed choice.

When the hierarch in ‘The Child of the Phalanstery’ describes the horrors for the community in the birth of “cripples”, his language is not dissimilar to that in ‘The Girl of the Future’ where Allen warns against the birth of “rickety offspring”⁶⁷ and the “tottering, narrow browed, gouty weanlings”⁶⁸ resulting from the union of “morbid” progenitors. The indictment of anti-parentalism in the ‘Phalanstery’ – or more correctly, anti-maternalism – is a stance which he had considerably altered by 1890, when Allen makes very clear that the rights to parenthood should be conditional.

Charles Darwin in *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) had speculated that “it is highly probable [...] that the males first acquired their beards as an ornament through sexual selection”;⁶⁹ Allen criticised the way in which the beard was an unsophisticated signifier of primary sexual characters which could mislead as to the fitness of the possessor. He expressed regret for the action of unchecked Darwinian romantic impulses of the naive girl who would be drawn to conjugal relations with any male individual on the strength of “the first black moustache or the first Vandyke beard she may happen to fall in with”⁷⁰ and called for a more discriminatory, selective process which would bring about eugenic improvements.

'The Girl of the Future' is important in circumscribing women within a role form of "racial maternity"; by mating with as many of the noblest, most desirable males as possible, the dutiful female citizen of the future will be appointing herself to motherhood as a public office. This utopian trajectory will be determined by the promptings of maternal conscience, and such an "ideal of motherhood under such conditions would soon crystallise into a religious duty."⁷¹ Allen's view corresponded to that of the eugenicist Karl Pearson, to whom the "woman question" was central in his vision of a socialist future.

In 1888 in his essay 'Woman and Labour', Pearson considered how the (middle-class) woman "can do freely what she alone can do for society, and yet have full power to control her own special activities, and develop her own individual life"; he found the answer to the problem did not lie in the "equality of opportunity" demanded by the women's movement, but in "special protection, in the socialisation of the State. The woman of the near future will be as thorough a socialist as she is now an out-and-out individualist."⁷² In *The Ethic of Free Thought* (1888) Pearson has recourse to (neo-Lamarckian) biology to explain woman's role; he asks if submission to man were not already in woman's nature: "she has learnt self-control in the past by subjecting her will to his, so in the future she may be able to submit her liberty to the restraints demanded by social welfare, and to the conditions imposed by race-permanence".⁷³ That is, she was to continue to have her rights subordinated and her being subjected to male interests and a world dominated by male activity, but in the name of the progress of the nation state.

Allen's interests in sexual maternity were fictionalised in *The Woman Who Did* (1895), and the following year, 1896, in *A Splendid Sin* (ASS). In this novel, which like *The British Barbarians*, has adultery at its controversial centre, the author pursued his project of accruing literary value through the scientific romanticism of eugenics. The New Woman character in this novel is the mother, who had conceived her son in an extramarital affair with a charming poet, contravening traditional sexual morality and freeing herself – and her biology – from the clutches of her husband, a degenerate Colonel. Mrs Egremont's son, the evolutionist, eugenically fit Hubert – who closely resembles his author: (he “drives[s] poetry and physiology tandem”) – speaks against the forces of Victorian conservatism.

Hubert Egremont believes that women should forge a new morality in their civic duty as mothers by avoiding producing offspring who would inherit the hereditary taints of the father. Yet Mrs Egremont's unhappy relationship with a brutal drunk is considered less from the feminist standpoint of the individual's rights to safety and happiness, rather than her duty as a responsible sexual citizen not to mate with a hereditary degenerate.

In one of many discussions on the importance of heredity in the formation of character, Hubert's mother tentatively asks her son's opinion upon whether a woman should stay with her husband, “[i]f he is, for example a drunkard, or a gambler, or a forger, or a rake, or a man of cruelly brutal instincts, you think she should not live with him? She should cut herself adrift from his hateful presence?” ‘Of course’, Hubert answered calmly” (ASS 88). But instead of concern for the individual woman, and her safety, as was expressed by feminists in their call for marriage reforms, he

replies, “[t]hat is her clear duty. Ought she to people the world with children tainted from their birth, and spoil her own nobler or better qualities by admixture with vile and low and unworthy ones?” Allen is not interested in women’s rights within marriage and divorce laws, his reductionist analysis sees individuals as social agents for a seemingly abstract biological imperative; or as Hubert says elsewhere when insisting on the omnipotence of heredity in mankind: “I almost feel at times as if I had no individuality at all of my own; I recognise myself as nothing more in the end than the sum of my joint parental tendencies”(ASS 44).

The novel closes with Hubert’s hysterical rhapsodies of gratitude and relief for his mother’s “splendid sin”, which frees him to marry his intended, Fede, with a bill of eugenic health: “[s]uch sins are purer far than half this World’s purity. It is love – and natural fitness – not the word of a priest or a law that sanctifies. And the result shows it. To be that great soul’s son – not the loathsome drunkard’s”(ASS 157). After the shocked response of the reading public to *The Woman Who Did*, Allen re-presented the presentation of his principles for free-love unions, associating them more explicitly with the more tangible and threatening reasons of medical fitness.

The progressive morality of the splendid sin is produced within Foucault’s “perversion-heredity-degenerescence” series which linked a genealogy in which heredity was scarred with maladies – “a hemiplegic ancestor, a phthisic parent, or an uncle afflicted with senile dementia”⁷⁴ – to one which could go on to produce sexual perversion. The villainous, phthisic father makes Mrs Egremont’s extra-marital affair more palatable and reasonable to the reader. Moreover, as Foucault’s analysis of the relationship between perversity and heredity indicates, the plot’s drive towards closure

with Hubert's marriage to Fede circumscribes sexual relations more firmly within a proper restoration of family sexual health. Allen's return to the marriage plot and theme of eugenic fitness in *A Splendid Sin* suggests that his treatment of free-love union through its advocacy by a New Woman in *The Woman Who Did* was intended less to promote a belief in free-love, than a wish to undermine the New Woman through association with it.

Herminia Barton, the heroine of *The Woman Who Did*, after she is left with sole responsibility for her baby with no financial provision, stands by her principles of anti-marriage to the bitter end. Despite the ostensible incongruity of her radical principles with her religious upbringing, Herminia regards herself "as a living proof of the doctrine of heredity" (*WWD* 30); she suggests to her lover, Alan Merrick, that she has inherited her love of right and logic from her father, her mantra is that of John in the New Testament: "the truth shall make you free". Marriage, Herminia argues is the main stumbling block to women's emancipation, only freed from its slavery will women come into their true maternal identity, and, with a heightened sense of historicity, she claims that her offspring is "predestined to regenerate humanity" (*WWD* 80). She embarks on a free-love union with Alan who promptly dies after she becomes pregnant. Herminia becomes socially *déclassé* and struggles as a novelist then a poor journalist. More tragedy ensues when her daughter, Dolores, reveals she is not going to be the New Woman incarnate as Herminia had hoped. Aiming to avoid her mother's unhappy lot, and ashamed of her illegitimacy, Dolly seeks to redress social misdemeanour through marriage and resumption of her respectable grandfather's company and her father's reputable name. Outcast even by her daughter,

Herminia asks Dolly's forgiveness when she honourably commits suicide with Prussic acid.

Alison Cotes, in her comparison of "free union" in George Gissing's *The Odd Women* and Allen's *The Woman Who Did*, analyses Herminia's character using a false dichotomy which sees her as embodying both "the best of the avant-garde feminist ideals [...] and the old Victorian ideal of the sanctity of motherhood".⁷⁵ By interpreting Herminia as an unusual hybrid, she does not relate her to a greater network of fictional New Women. This division sustains an inaccurate association between the feminist avant-garde with the promotion of free-love unions and the simultaneous desanctification of motherhood. All contemporary feminist positions advocated higher education and some career opportunities for women, yet at no point does Herminia or her creator wholeheartedly endorse the action of any platform of the women's movement, so Herminia cannot be described as holding those ideals. Neither do her views on motherhood need to be attributed to the old Victorian ideal; many figures of avant-garde feminism, Olive Schreiner for example, sanctified motherhood, particularly in national terms. The third term which makes sense of the disparity between these constructs is eugenic sexual maternity; a strongly sexualised femininity which was philoprogenitive in nature which when freed from the conventional constraints of property and polite society might be naturally discerning of the fittest mate.

Angelique Richardson has drawn attention to the way that *The Woman Who Did* shares a eugenic agenda with some New Woman fiction, citing Herminia's understanding of her heredity as signalling eugenic discourses. Although the novel's

eugenic ideological underpinning is expressed in its characters' self-understanding in terms of heredity, the plot does not signify such a confidence in the powers of hereditarily transmitted character as we might suppose. Allen understood that just as heredity contained the elements for improvement, so too could the random element of chance play havoc with the smooth ascent of progress, as his treatment of heredity in 'The Child of the Phalanstery' seems to show. Yet there was a more insidious assumption at work here. In his most vitriolic attack on women in 'Woman's Place in Nature', Allen deployed the Darwinian assertion that women inherit their strongest qualities through the male line, because the greatest achievements have been made by men; these qualities "have been communicated to posterity through the male element in reproduction, and so far as women share in them at all, they share in them in virtue of being their fathers' daughters, not by being their mothers".⁷⁶

In a letter to Allen, thanking him for sending his book, Thomas Hardy commented upon the novel's narrative structure; he claimed to have anticipated "the daughter's revolt" in a tragic fifth act, interpreting it as a "reversion to the old type" during his reading.⁷⁷ Dolly, who endorses the values of her conservative (and affluent) grandfather is determined to reintegrate herself into the Merrick family, expressing a nature which rebels against all her mother's cherished principles. If, as with Herminia's resemblance in character to her father, it is the force of heredity which exacts its revenge on the utopian dreams of regeneration which she had fostered, it becomes clear that much of Allen's "scientific" plotting is the basis for grounding a backlash to feminism.

The key purpose in his vision of women being in free unions is in order to advocate eugenic pro-natalism. A vision of an exclusively maternal citizenship for women enabled Allen to criticise the New Woman's feminist ideals of higher education and work; women's economic and social independence are rigorously opposed by Allen, because "a scheme of female education ought to be mainly a scheme for the education of wives and mothers", ⁷⁸ any other education was transforming the precious "cultivated classes", "unfit to be wives or mothers". ⁷⁹ He envisages a society in which women become wholly reliant on men for their subsistence, supported by their labour in order to dedicate themselves to motherhood; Herminia sees her career as a transitional stage in the progress toward a utopian society in which women will be supported wholly by men whilst women assume all parental duties:

only by becoming a mother, accepting the orbit for which nature designed her [...] complete independence would be secured for each woman by the civilised state, or, in other words, by the whole body of men who do the hard work of the world. [...] and she held it just that women should so be provided for, because the mothers of the community fulfil in the state as important and necessary a function as the men themselves do (*WWD* 60).

After she has asserted herself in her principle of non-contractual sexual relations with Alan, Herminia resumes her natural womanly role of obedience, yielding and passive

to his will and tastes, a contradiction inappropriate to psychological realism, as Garrett Fawcett astutely observed.⁸⁰

Although Grant Allen's sexualised new mother appears to contradict traditional cultural feminine behaviours, his representation of her nature is one fundamentally unchanged from the patriarchal ideal: "[d]eep down in the very roots of the idea of sex, we come on the prime antithesis - the male, active and aggressive, the female, sedentary, passive and receptive" (*WWD* 64). This rhetoric of irreducible primary sexual difference as rooted in biology had been propounded in such popular works as Geddes and Thomson's *The Evolution of Sex* (1889),⁸¹ and is a key note of Allen's thought; essential in his construction of sexual maternity, the insistence on "womanly women" lies at the heart of his eugenic enterprise.

Arguing that women were primarily defined through "[t]heir sexuality (which lies at the basis of everything)"⁸² and its maternal function, in one of his most misogynist essays Allen went on to argue that women could only play a secondary and reproductive role in evolutionary progress, "the males are the race; the females are merely the sex told off to recruit and reproduce it".⁸³ Such a statement was clearly antagonistic to the scientific claims of feminism that women were more evolutionarily evolved than men, and would be in the vanguard of leading the "race" forward. As a "progressive" eugenicist, he was hostile to the spiritual basis of social-purity feminism whose advocates argued that purity ideals ennobled women and the race by placing them beyond the reach of nature's base, animal instincts. Allen promoted the view that women's roles should be firmly anchored within the physical laws of biology, and

his efforts toward this end, in the context of New Woman writers' lives, will be discussed in chapter 4.

¹ Peter Morton, *The Vital Science: Biology and the Literary Imagination 1860 - 1900* (George London: Allen and Unwin, 1984).

² *Woman's Penny Paper* (28 Nov.1890).

³ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, 'The Woman Who Did – review', *Contemporary Review* vol. 67 (1895): 625-631(630).

⁴ Peter Morton, *The Vital Science* (1984). More recently, Morton has defended Allen's notoriously negative stance on the higher education of women, suggesting that the "ideal education he does propose for women is much more like what they might get today". Peter Morton cited in Barbara Arnett Melchiori, *Grant Allen: The Downward Path Which Leads To Fiction* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 2000): 74. Peter Morton's bibliography can be found at http://www.flinders.edu.au/topics/Morton/Victorians/Grant_Allen_bibliography.html.

⁵ Morton writes, "he seems to have had no personal enemies and to have been on good terms with practically everyone in the literary London of his day". Peter Morton, 'Grant Allen : A Centenary Reassessment', *English Literature in Transition* 44:4 (September 2001): 415.

⁶ Ibid: 405.

⁷ Barbara Arnett Melchiori, *Grant Allen: The Downward Path Which Leads To Fiction* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 2000): 19.

⁸ Ibid: 47.

⁹ See Angelique Richardson, *The Eugenization of Love: Darwin, Galton and the New Woman Fictions and Eugenics*. PhD thesis, Birbeck College University of London, 1999.

¹⁰ 'Grant Allen: Literature and Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle: A Centenary Conference' was held at the University of the West of England in November 1999. A collection of papers from the conference, including a version of this chapter, edited by William Greenslade and Terence Rodgers will be published by Ashgate Press in 2003.

¹¹ Juliet Gardiner, *The New Woman* (London: Collins and Brown 1993): 171.

¹² Letters from Emma Brooke and from Ménie Muriel Norman to Grant Allen. Grant Allen Archive, Pennsylvania State University Library, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.

¹³ Hardy wrote of New Woman novels to Edward Clodd that, "[o]wing, I suppose to the accident of its appearance just after the sheaf of purpose-novels we have had lately on the marriage question, – though written long before them – some of the papers class mine with them – though the case of my people is one of temperamental unfitness for the contract, peculiar to the family of the parties" (10 Nov 1895). Letter from T. Hardy to E. Clodd, Clodd Archive, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

¹⁴ Edward Clodd, *Grant Allen, A Memoir* (London: Grant Richards,1900). Clodd records that Charles Darwin contributed toward the purchase of a microscope for Allen.

¹⁵ In his review of Allen's book, Karl Pearson sarcastically suggested that while reading it "we have felt out sympathy with the orthodox mediaeval theologian rapidly growing. We have understood better how his angry passions were excited when he found a layman preaching a new gospel with the old terminology, but without apparently having ever

mastered the old philosophy and the old orthodox theology". 'Force and Energy: A Theory of Dynamics. By Grant Allen', *Academy* no. 869 (29 Dec 1888): 42-43.

¹⁶ Allen's known pseudonyms were Martin Leach Warborough, Cecil Power, J. Arbuthnot Wilson and the distinctively female, Olive Pratt Rayner.

¹⁷ Grant Allen, *The British Barbarians* (1895; London: Garland Publishing, 1977).

¹⁸ Millicent Garrett Fawcett, 'The Woman Who Did – [A Review]' (1895): 625-631.

¹⁹ Fawcett notes that Herminia teaches in a high school but is "to be congratulated on the good salary she draws, for she wanders about the Surrey woods richly dight in a dress embroidered with gold and jewels". *Ibid*: 626.

²⁰ H. G. Wells, 'The Woman Who Did, Review', *Saturday Review* (9 March 1895): 319-20 (319).

²¹ See N. N. Feltes, *Literary Capital and the Late Victorian Novel* (Wisconsin: University Wisconsin Press, 1993).

²² *Op.cit* : 319.

²³ For discussion of the Victorian cultural construction of meat see, Carol J. Adams, *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1990).

²⁴ E. L. Linton, 'Candour in English Fiction', *New Review* (Jan.1890): 6-21(11).

²⁵ *Ibid*: 14.

²⁶ George Robb, 'Race Motherhood: Moral Eugenics vs Progressive Eugenics, 1880-1920'. *Maternal Instincts: Visions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Britain 1875-1925*. Eds. Claudia Nelson and Ann Sumner Holmes (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1997): 59-74.

²⁷ August Weismann, *Essays upon Heredity and Kindred Biological Problems*. Eds. Edward B. Poulton, Selmar Schönland, and Arthur E. Shipley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1889).

²⁸ Laura Otis, *Membranes: Metaphors of Invasion in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Science and Politics* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1999).

²⁹ Edward Clodd, *Grant Allen: A Memoir* (London: Grant Richards, 1900): 130.

³⁰ Grant Allen, 'A Hill-top Stronghold', *Longman's Magazine* (May 1889): 33.

³¹ Anthropological interest in prehistoric and Roman Britain abounded; Hardy had already published his short story, *A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork* as *Ancient Earthworks and What Two Enthusiastic Scientists Found Therein* in the *Detroit Post* (15 March, 1885) which described archaeological finds at the iron age hillfort of Maiden Castle in Dorchester. See Martin Ray *Thomas Hardy: A Textual Study of the Short Stories* (London: Ashgate, 1997).

³² *The New Oxford Dictionary Of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³³ See W. R. Trotter, *The Hilltop Writers: A Victorian Colony Among the Surrey Hills* (Lewes: The Book Guild, 1996).

³⁴ For example, George Moore's writing in the novel *Esther Waters* (1894) gives a more balanced picture of the pleasures and dangers of betting.

³⁵ Amongst others, Ella Hepworth Dixon, *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894); Netta Syrett, *Nobody's Fault* (1896); Sarah Grand, *The Baby's Tragedy* (1894), *Our Manifold Nature* (1894); and Emma F. Brooke, *A Superfluous Woman* (1894).

³⁶ J. Arbuthnot Wilson, 'Our Scientific Observations on a Ghost', *Belgravia* 36 (July 1878), 45-59.

³⁷ Grant Allen, 'My First Book', *Idler* 2 (1894): 48.

³⁸ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (London: Harvard University Press, 1995): 118.

³⁹ Grant Allen, *Strange Stories* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1884): v.

⁴⁰ Edward Clodd, *Grant Allen: A Memoir*: 88.

⁴¹ *Ibid*: 93.

⁴² 183/3. Francis Galton, *Natural Inheritance and Selection, Notebook on Origins of Varieties*, Galton Papers, University College London.

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- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Angelique Richardson, *The Eugenization of Love* (1999).
- ⁴⁵ Clodd, *Grant Allen: A Memoir*: 90.
- ⁴⁶ Grant Allen, *Twelve Tales* (London: Grant Richards, 1899).
- ⁴⁷ Grant Allen, 'The Romance of Race' *Cornhill* (Oct.1897): 461-471(464).
- ⁴⁸ Grant Allen, *Twelve Tales* (London: Grant Richards 1899): v.
- ⁴⁹ See Michel Foucault *The History of Sexuality, Volume One: An Introduction* (1978; London: Penguin, 1990).
- ⁵⁰ Grant Allen 'The Romance of Race', *Cornhill Magazine* (Oct. 1897) 461-471: 464.
- ⁵¹ Grant Allen, *What's Bred in The Bone* (London: TitBits Offices, 1891).
- ⁵² The snake's name evokes decadence; it is that of the last, wealthy and sensuous Assyrian King remembered in Byron's drama of 1821: "Sardanapalus, Sardanapalus, Sardanapalus! The very name seemed to link itself with the music in her head. It coursed with her blood. It rang in her brain"(WBB 75).
- ⁵³ The protagonist of Egerton's story "fancies she is on the stage of an ancient theatre [...]. Her arms are clasped by jewelled snakes, and one with quivering diamond fangs coils round her hips. [...] She bounds forward and dances, bends her lissom waist, and curves her slender arms". George Egerton, 'A Cross Line', *Keynotes* (1893) *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin de Siècle*. Ed. Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1993): 47-68 (58).
- ⁵⁴ Ibid : 74.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid: 133.
- ⁵⁶ Grant Allen, Preface to *Strange Stories* (1884).
- ⁵⁷ See Patrick Parrinder, 'Eugenics and Utopia', *Utopian Studies*, 8 (2), 1997: 1-12 .
- ⁵⁸ Angelique Richardson, 'Allopathic Pills? Health, Fitness and New Woman fictions', *Woman: A Cultural Review* (Spring 1999):1-21(9).
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ⁶⁰ Grant Allen, 'Falling in Love', *Fortnightly Review* 40 (1886): 455.
- ⁶¹ Ibid: 460.
- ⁶² Ibid: 460.
- ⁶³ Grant Allen, 'Falling in Love', *Fortnightly Review* 40 (1886) : 457.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid: 457.
- ⁶⁵ Grant Allen, 'Falling in Love'(1886): 458.
- ⁶⁶ Grant Allen, 'The Girl of the Future', *Universal Review* 7:25 (7 May 1890): 54.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid: 51.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid: 52.
- ⁶⁹ Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871; New Jersey: Princeton University Press , 1981; London: John Murray, 1888 ed. Reprint): 379.
- ⁷⁰ Grant Allen, 'The Girl of the Future'(1890): 50.
- ⁷¹ Ibid: 61.
- ⁷² Karl Pearson, 'Woman and Labour', *Fortnightly Review* (1888): 561-577 (569).
- ⁷³ Karl Pearson, 'The Woman's Question', *The Ethic of Free thought* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1888): 394.
- ⁷⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (1990): 118.
- ⁷⁵ Alison Cotes, 'Gissing, Grant Allen and "Free Union"'. *The Gissing Newsletter* 19:4 (Oct.1983): 1-18 (10).
- ⁷⁶ Grant Allen, 'Woman's Place in Nature', *Forum* 7 (1899): 258-263 (260).
- ⁷⁷ Thomas Hardy remarked in a letter to Allen thanking him for the copy of *The Woman Who Did* he had sent: '[t]he great stroke of tragedy to my mind is the daughter's revolt. That was the indisputable 5th act – & I quite trembled when – during her childhood – I feared you

might not take advantage of the splendid ending such a reversion to the old type would afford. (I had not peeped, & it was curious to find how exactly you had anticipated my view).’ (16 Feb. 1895) *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy Vol. 2: 1893-1901*. Eds. M. Millgate and R. L. Purdy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980): 68.

⁷⁸ Grant Allen, ‘Plain Words on the Woman Question’, *Popular Science Monthly* (1889): 178.

⁷⁹ Ibid: 179.

⁸⁰ Fawcett complains of Herminia that “[w]hen she does not like Perugia, she does not even dare tell her lover so, but weeps about it in secret. If there were anything real or human about her, one would say she had put herself too much in the man’s power for her to dare to say that her soul was her own, or to differ from him even on a point of taste’. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, ‘The Woman Who Did’, *Contemporary Review* (1895): 627.

⁸¹ The principle of katabolic and anabolic essences as the basis of male and female sexual difference was theorised in *The Evolution of Sex* (1889) by Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson.

⁸² Grant Allen, ‘Plain Words on the Woman Question’, *Popular Science Monthly* (1889): 179.

⁸³ Grant Allen, ‘Woman’s Place in Nature’: 263.

Chapter 3

Aesthetics, desire and the fantastic: Vernon Lee's *Hauntings*.

Vernon Lee – the pen name of Violet Paget (1856-1935) – enjoyed a long writing career; she published her first essay at the age of 13, and much work followed from her *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880); essays, short stories, books about travel, art, the Renaissance, and what she considered to be her most important writing, that on aesthetics. Born in France, her early childhood was spent in Germany and then in Italy, where she spent most of her life and whose culture and history informed and inspired her literary production. Identified by critics today as a “female aesthete” and a “decadent woman”, by her own admission Lee avoided the Woman Question;¹ I will consider the ways in which her writing does engage with the “feminist” concerns over gender ideologies, albeit in a less polemical, and more allegorical way than her New Woman colleagues. By reading the work of female aesthetes, Vernon Lee and in chapter 6, Alice Meynell, in the context of a literary field shared with the New Woman, by examining the cross-currents of influence between them I hope to use such comparisons to contribute to a clarification of what the sexual politics and literary characteristics of the New Women were.

Yet the distinction between female aesthetes and New Women writers was, indeed academic for many of their critics of the 1890s who, as Elaine Showalter demonstrates, often lumped together the male decadents and aesthetes with the New Woman as sexual anarchists in their lifestyles, dress and literary treatments of gender identity. We might more productively understand women writers of this period as closely linked in their interests, aims, personal and professional lives. In 1894 at the Fifth

Annual Meeting of the Co-fraternity of Women Writers which took place at the Criterion Restaurant in London, aestheticist and New Woman Mona Caird was seated at a dinner table with journalist Evelyn March-Phillips; the essayist Alice Meynell with the polemic novelist Mrs Mannington Caffyn (“Iota”); and the best seller writer of military romances John Strange Winter with the aesthetic poet Elizabeth Sharp, reported the *Woman's Signal*.² We can only imagine the conversations and disputes which took place, but the evidence of such meetings remind us of the affiliations existing in the professional networks between these women working in different fields.

From a wealthy background, educated beyond the means of some of her female contemporaries, with an independent income, Lee had a lifestyle which enabled her to write at a more leisurely pace and, to an extent, to choose the “high-brow” periodicals in which she wished to publish; the pressures of competition and survival in the literary market were not so intense for her as with other writers, even in her field. Grant Allen’s writing provides an instructive comparison with Vernon Lee; working quickly to meet several deadlines, he was pushed to be polemical and hard-line both thematically and stylistically; by contrast, Lee’s aestheticism, her wit and the formal complexity in her successful ghost stories is partly an effect of her position in the marketplace, and of enjoying certain intellectual freedoms. Lee attained cultural capital through her self-consciously modern methodological and critical affiliations. But it was a modernity which eschewed the totalising tendencies of the authoritative discourse of science: her writing on evolutionary psychology with its the concepts of Associationism and empathy, participates in the new interest in the observing subject.

Her interests in purity, her critique of art for art’s sake and exposition of decadence and the “fleshly school”, yet her friendship and admiration for Walter Pater,

Oscar Wilde and others of the aesthete circle meant she had a complex critical and personal relationship with those debates. In his biography of Lee, Peter Gunn has suggested how Lee questioned her own investment and position on sexual purity and perversity in her satirical novel *Miss Brown* (1884); referring to this novel in a diary entry, Lee examined “this seemingly scientific, philanthropic, idealizing, decidedly noble-looking nature of mine” and wondered whether “I [may] be indulging a mere depraved appetite for the loathsome while I *fancy* that I am studying diseases and probing wounds for the sake of diminishing both? Perhaps... [t]he question is, which of these two, the prudes or the easy-goers, are themselves normal, healthy?”³ This discourse of the role of novelist as a sort of medical officer for public health was of course shared with social-purity women writers as a commentary on the unhealthy, sexually immoral texts of male writers and painters, as I have discussed in chapter 1. But Lee asks, how might such a position articulate an interest in the very thing it appears to repudiate?⁴ And can perversity infect the examiner who is in the supposedly objective position of “probing” another’s body/text? Lee’s self-reflexiveness indicates how her novel cannot solely be grouped with that of the purity polemics of New Woman writing, and this ambivalence is most clearly situated in her fantasy writing.

Beginning with Vernon Lee’s work on physiological aesthetics which grounds her ideas in the working of psychology, I will discuss the mediation between aesthetics, psychology and feminism in her prose and fiction. My discussion of her short stories published in the collection *Hauntings: Fantastic Stories* (1889), ‘Dionea’, ‘Amour Dure’, and ‘Oke of Okehurst, the Phantom Lover’ will consider her treatment of female “beauty” and its place in myth and the representation of female subjectivity in relation to evolutionary discourses of “fitness”. As with the writing of many of her contemporaries

at the fin de siècle, it is difficult to attribute to Lee a single or consistent ideological position on fitness, morality and beauty. The scholarly discourse of the discipline and publishing field to which it belonged required that her theory on psychological aesthetics be more methodical and conclusive in style and content; yet, even here, she consciously eschewed the definitive conclusions of science. Her fantastic fiction, motivated by uncertainty, unsettles any totalising viewpoint and interpretation. The narratives undermine the solidity of the “real”, like James’s *Turn of the Screw* (1898), it offered instead a bewildering liminality of border crossings between the “phantasmatic” and the “real”.

In his reading of Lee’s, ‘A Wicked Voice’, Carlo Caballero comments on the positive role of “aural fantasy” that exists in this story, and suggests that its pleasure acts almost as an exorcism from the totality of the “joylessness of her own aesthetic system”.⁵ Rather than seeing Lee’s fictional output as totally bifurcated from her theoretical, I have found her fiction to illustrate the visual and ideological uncertainties which her aesthetic principles detail. Her work in both forms is characterised by an ambiguity and contradiction on the question of “art for arts sake”, and on the discourses of fitness, purity and morality which I discuss. Ruth Robbins makes Lee’s contradiction the key point of her identification with literary Decadence, that her work often enacts an eschewing of moral judgement is central to Robbins’ positioning of Lee as Decadent Woman.⁶ Angela Leighton, by associating Lee with Wildean Aestheticism characterises her work as playful, and identifies this tone in her work as that which keeps open the space “between beauty and morality, aesthetics and ideology”.⁷ Consciously revelling in the provocations of contradiction, ambiguity and contradiction characterise Vernon Lee’s work to the extent that they seem to be a central condition for her creativity. The act of

perception/creation/criticism is for Lee, governed by an ambiguity which evades the tidy ethical categorisations which arise in discussion of her treatment of evolution and eugenics.

Vernon Lee's writing on art and literary history was resistant to the prevailing model of criticism in the nineteenth century best represented by Arnold and Ruskin. As recent scholarship has argued (Hilary Fraser, 1998; Ruth Robbins, 2000; Angela Leighton, 2000), Lee consciously signalled her modernity through the shift away from the ideological securities of a Victorian visual economy in aesthetics in which sight was the authoritative sense for critic and artist, and the means of knowing the object, toward foregrounding the role of subjectivity in the act of perception. The artist's act of expressing their internal world was problematised, as Arthur Symonds, a leading exponent of decadence in England, had put it: "this endeavour after a perfect truth to one's impression, to one's intuition – perhaps an impossible endeavour –".⁸ In particular Lee's emphasis on experiential, embodied perspectives belonged to a critical position which can be identified with Pater, and his decadent aesthetic.

In *The Renaissance, Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873), Pater had emphasised the role of the observer and his or her receptivity in experiencing the aesthetic artefact, urging them to be self-reflective: "[h]ow is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence? [...] one must realise such primary data for one's self, or not at all";⁹ at the same time, this predication of criticism on the unreliability of the senses to offer an objective truth, distanced aesthetics from ethics and metaphysics. Sharing Pater's concern with the relationships between eye, mind and word, Vernon Lee produced narratives which inhabit the disjuncture between "reality" and the "impression". In her use of the fantastic, Lee sought not to demonstrate the empiricism of scientific laws, seeking

rationalities at the basis of the seemingly supernatural, fantastic or sensational as, for example, Grant Allen did.

Lee's interest in these modes of perception had their foundation in Associationism, the key tenet of her aesthetic theory which she works out most fully in an early essay, 'The Lake of Charlemagne' in the volume of collected essays, *Juvenilia* (1881). This mechanism of the imagination explains the formation and action of aesthetic preferences. For Lee, Association was the faculty which governs the process of perception and creation, the action of the imaginative mind on the memory, which makes the unfamiliar known by recourse to the known: "[d]o you think that we perceive, much less remember, the totally unknown? Not a bit of it; we merely constantly recognize the already familiar";¹⁰ in Lee's formulation, cognition is essentially recognition. The rehabilitation of Associationist theory into aesthetic theory, which had been introduced a hundred years earlier by Archibald Alison (1790) and discredited in the nineteenth century, has been credited to Lee by Ian Small.¹¹ Psychology, in particular evolutionary psychology, was fundamental to her reconstruction and deployment of Associationism.

The role of aesthetic responses in natural selection forming as it did, an important element of Darwin's theory of sexual selection in *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) continued to be debated throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century. Grant Allen had from these foundations developed the theory of a physiological basis to aesthetic preferences through evolutionary biology in his first book *Physiological Aesthetics* (1874), and again detailed in the article 'Aesthetic Evolution in Man' in *Mind* (1880). He claimed that "[t]he facts on which Mr Darwin bases his theory of sexual selection thus become of the first importance for the aesthetic philosopher, because they are really the only solid evidence for the existence of a love for beauty in the infra-human

world.”¹² In Allen’s argument, “[t]he ugly for every kind, in its own eyes, must always be (in the main) the deformed, the aberrant, the weakly, the unnatural, the impotent. The beautiful for every kind must similarly be (in the main) the healthy, the normal, the strong, the perfect,” and, because his interests were headed toward eugenics at this time, as had been discussed in the previous chapter, significantly, “the parentally sound”.¹³ Lee was acquainted with Grant Allen’s writing on Associationism,¹⁴ and it seems likely as a contributor herself to the *Fortnightly Review* and other such publications at this time that she would have known his polemical pieces which work out the reproductive implications for social and national progress, and her discourse shares these fin-de-siècle concerns with national health, morality and purity.¹⁵

Although their routes through psychology and physiology were contiguous, their aims and objectives in aesthetics were not the same; Lee’s treatment of beauty does not come to the same conclusions as Allen, in whose rhetoric beauty functions wholly as an indicator of “fitness”.¹⁶ Like so many other contemporary Victorian thinkers, Lee invokes the dominant mode of scientific empiricism: “the study of what beauty is can be done only by the scientific methods of comparison and elimination”.¹⁷ Although her investigations into aesthetic impulse and empathy in *Beauty and Ugliness* (1897; 1912) and *The Beautiful* (1913) evoke such discourses of evolutionism, these prove to be less of an integral part of a systematic methodology and more for the cultural capital such a discourse serves.

Like Allen, starting from a notion of “racial memory” Lee suggests that the appreciation of beauty has developed and persisted in humans through the principle of selection, but, Lee asks, what is its use and why has it developed? What is its evolutionary reason and its racial advantage? Thus she frames her study, with the enquiry: “[w]hat has

Aesthetic Empathy been able to contribute to the survival of the individuals and of the races gifted with this aesthetico-dynamic delusion?" Finding that most of our thought is automatic and outside of reason, Lee demands: "[w]hen shall we recognise that the bulk of our psychic life is unconscious or semi-unconscious, the life of long-organised and automatic functions [?]"¹⁸ These functions are connected within the notion of the utility of race memory and the preference for beauty over ugliness between "races" which arises from their use and attractiveness:

[w]ere we to seek the reason why a strong and healthy human body of our own race gives a general sense of beauty which we should not receive from a deformed negro [...] we must consequently seek the explanation of the sense of beauty connected with the one figure, and of ugliness connected with the other, in the practical generalization made thousands of years ago, that a body formed in one way was useful and agreeable.¹⁹

Instead of looking for a cultural reason, utilising conventional Victorian categories of difference she uses a biological explanation; in Lee's rhetorical strategy the "deformed negro" – not unlike Galton's "negress" in his eugenic computations discussed in chapter 2 – becomes an Other for the white subject, suggestive of the alterity of an outmoded evolutionary relic stranded in modern times. These distinctions of beauty and ugliness however, no longer persist for Lee; there are no intrinsic qualities about beauty in a figure, but for the meanings "made thousands of years ago". That is, she does not insist on the continuing use of these indicators for a guide to what is fit now. Evolution is not understood as directed, or producing and modifying the most perfect forms through the

action of association, as for example, Grant Allen understands it. Instead, the psychological processes of associative perception and its role in creation and sensory experience which occur in dynamic conditions, are characterised by randomness. If aesthetic preferences grew out of racial hierarchisation and enmity, then Lee also suggests that their original motives are then obliterated with the passing of time, the disordered action of association fractures cohesive origins. In *Beauty and Ugliness* Lee concludes that the role of aesthetic empathy in sexual selection is marginal, she claims that “[t]hese facts and theories will allow us to discard, as mere side issues [...] the various attempts to account for notions of beauty and ugliness by reference to transmuted recognition of utility and inutility, to sexual selection, and to the survival of obsolete primeval activities.”²⁰ Her interests were not primarily in demonstrating the evidence of the role of usefulness in “racial” memory, but in the internal associations of the individual which exceeded the rational.

In this, and on a number of fundamental points for the application of this theory to art and literature, Lee’s theoretical positions endorsed the critical perspectives of Pater and Symonds, the leading figures in the Decadence movement in England. Lee’s Associationism is strongly informed by a Paterian aesthetic. Pater had, for example, in the conclusion to *The Renaissance*, described the processes of reflection and perception as fleeting, momentary, atomised, and created in the mind of the perceiver:

if we continue to dwell in thought on this world, not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further: the whole scope of observation is dwarfed to the narrow chamber of the

individual mind. Experience, already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.²¹

The mechanism of association made sense and beauty, Lee said, momentarily out of “little shreds” and “broken down fragments”; “heterogeneous dabs” and “snatches” which mark the “chaotic whirl of atoms”;²² beautiful form results from what can only ever be an incomplete impression. The meaning of artistic form is not over determined, as in Darwinian narratives of progressive development, it is disorder which produces it. Beauty arises from some kind of “accident of a greater than usual homogeneousness in these seething atoms [...] There arise in this chaos agglomerations which are no longer chaotic; there appear in this constant change things which are stable”.²³ Lee’s use of Associationism grasps at a relationship between language and the unconscious, in which the psychological processes of association which determine perception and the construction of meaning imply that language cannot have fixed meaning or values because the reader or viewer’s interpretation of the text or object is compounded by subjective interpretative frames of reference; a view which anticipates the terms of post-structuralist analysis of language. Aesthetic preferences were located in the unconscious, and as such, outside the logico-rational process of the clear moral judgements of art such as John Ruskin had made. Forms do not have an absolute reality or fixity, but are subject to the shifting associations and investments of the imagination and the individual experience. Associationism posited that there was no objective totality for representation,

as the certainties of the professors Matthew Arnold and Ruskin had promised. There could be no “reality” to an object if it was constituted from associations for the process involved a constant referral, and deferral, of meaning.

In her essay ‘Ruskinism’, a caustic attack on John Ruskin’s moral aesthetic system grounded in religious ethics, Vernon Lee’s secular, even atheistic, analysis argues that the art of any civilisation decays and regrows in cycles, to be replaced by new forms which in turn would die off. In this evolutionary model of culture as an organic system, Lee deployed an analogy which avoids the determinacy of biological essentialism. With it she aimed to bring aesthetic principles in line with modern thought: “in [Ruskin’s] system which makes artistic inferiority the visible expression of moral corruption, and national misfortune its direct punishment, there can be no room for any of the great laws of development and decay which historical science is now beginning to perceive.”²⁴ An organic, rather than a moral basis, could explain the decay of Gothic architecture: “[t]he perfect forms had been obtained, and as the growth of the art could not be checked, imperfect ones naturally succeeded them”;²⁵ she concludes: “[a]n art corrupts and dies of its own vital principles as does every other living and changing thing”,²⁶ an analogy whose secularism is compounded from new evolutionary perspectives. This notion of organicism addressed, and resisted, the pejorative associations of decadence with decay: decadence as a cultural symptom heralding the fall of a nation or decay of empire.

Lee is unequivocal about the exclusive natures of morality and beauty in ‘Ruskinism’: “the world of the physically beautiful is isolated from the world of the morally excellent”,²⁷ the basis of aesthetical likings or disliking seem ultimately to elide the “logical” explanations in relation to fitness contained in what Lee finds to be the “very confused and at present untenable idea of inherited habits and love of

proportion”.²⁸ Vernon Lee’s work expresses an abiding fascination and deep engagement with psychology – “the drama of soul molecules”²⁹ – as the product of evolutionary time with its deposits of ages forming the “soul” and directing our preferences, our instincts and loves, yet her treatment is not circumscribed by rigid ideological imperatives. Her understated and ambiguous conclusions, even to the point of contradiction, on the precise relationship between beauty and fitness and evolutionary mechanisms are indicative of her position-taking in this literary field which remains divorced from the dogmatic and polemic treatments of the subject.

Hilary Fraser in an essay on women art historians in the nineteenth century has said that “Lee’s valorisation of empathy may be conceived as a feminised imaginative strategy, designed to legitimate the specificity of the woman’s gaze”.³⁰ I would suggest, in contrast, that the emphasis on the subjective observer in the theory of empathy, and on their embodiment in the Paterian aesthetic which her theory corresponds to, having its origin in a male theory is not exclusively feminised. But, because like Pater’s, in part because of its grounding in an Other subject position of homoeroticism, it is also outside of the universalism of a detached, scientific gaze, and thus does lend itself to a localised, feminine critique. Lee’s theory of empathy was most fully worked out in *Beauty and Ugliness* co-written with Clementina (Kit) Anstruther-Thomson. First published in 1897 in two parts in the *Contemporary Review* and then as a collected volume in 1912, it undertakes a study of form in art and its effects on the body. Its conclusions, which give a theoretical respectability to the aesthetics in Pater’s notoriously “unscholarly” studies, are based on the “statue touching” of Anstruther-Thomson which resembles that of Winckelmann in Pater’s essay in *The Renaissance* – also a homoerotically centred aesthetic. Winckelmann’s “romantic, fervent friendships with young men”, says Pater, by

“bringing him into contact with the pride of human form, and staining the thoughts with its bloom, perfected his reconciliation to the spirit of Greek sculpture”.³¹ Such was his enthusiastic and susceptible nature, Pater tells us, that Winckelmann “apprehended the subtlest principles of the Hellenic manner, not through the understanding, but by instinct or touch”;³² Anstruther-Thomson’s intellectual congress with the statue goddesses is similarly “pure”. In Lee and Anstruther-Thomson’s researches, the sensations of movements evoked by the lines of the form are the basis of aesthetic empathy. The body’s “reading” of the art form is through a perception ground in the physical; the subject physiologically mimes the art object, reproducing its beauty, and it follows, the state of health and purity it represents. The changes produced in the body’s respiration and equilibrium are recorded as we observe the beautiful art object – heart beat, pulse, breathing, movement of the limbs, and their harmonious whole, register the impact of the beauty of art. Art is not simply for art’s sake, but moreover integral to health and happiness, or “vitality”; it is art for health’s sake, a pleasure in the healthy and beautiful body which participates, albeit ambiguously, in the eugenic discourses of beauty, health and purity at the turn of the century.

Lee made more explicit eugenicist connections between “ugliness”, health and degeneration over concerns for purity and perversity, in her private correspondence. Violet Paget enjoyed an intense, loving relationship with the poet, Mary A. F. Robinson from 1880 up to 1886 until Mary’s subsequent engagement to the French Jewish James Darmesteter, Professor of Persian in the Collège de France in August 1887. Violet Paget’s correspondence with her half-brother Eugene Lee Hamilton on the subject of the marriage of her once companion and beloved, pathologises Mary’s marriage in eugenic terms. Having apparently actually exacted vows from Robinson and Darmesteter that

they would keep their relationship platonic and unconsummated, Eugene and Violet combined to persuade Mary Robinson to break off her promise at one point during the engagement, but Robinson eventually married Darmesteter during the following year.

Burdett Gardner reads these letters as an expression of Violet's jealousy, and her antagonism toward the institutions of heterosexuality. Gardner's psychoanalytic biographical study which focuses on Vernon Lee's lesbianism reads the whole of her work as an expression of neurosis, a pathologisation of homosexuality which belongs to the nineteenth century rather than the late twentieth. My interest in the letters here is the use that Lee makes of eugenic discourses in expressing her hostility to the union. These letters indicate the widespread acceptance and circulation of eugenicist views at large in society. Lee can use them in her private correspondence, not because they are private and hidden views, but actually because they give her a more acceptable – because rational and scientific – discourse in which to articulate her emotional response.

Darmesteter had a hunched back; in one of her letters, Violet scathingly described his physicality as a monstrosity; he is

a dwarf, a humpback, a cripple from birth in so grievous and horrible a way that one can scarcely look at his quivering suffering mass of distortion when he is quiet, still less when he drags himself across the room. He looks as if all his stunted and misshapen little body (he is the size of a boy of ten) would fall to pieces...Really, two centuries ago, this Quasimodo would have been burnt for less.³³

This condemnation of his "ugliness" made in the light of her opinion of his fitness for marriage also disturbingly questions James Darmesteter's right to life as an offending

spectacle to aesthetic sensibility. In September of 1887 Lee Hamilton wrote to Violet of Mary, that, “[a] woman who is capable of engaging herself unconditionally to marry a rickety [sic] cripple whom she has seen only three times is, as far as that action goes, immodest and immoral. It will be no thanks to her, but to others if she do not become the mother of some scrofulous abortion.”³⁴ Violet considered Mary unsuited, even unfit for marriage as a woman “who could and should never be married at all”.³⁵ Perhaps as an independent, recognised woman poet with the financial support of her family Violet felt that Mary did not economically need a marriage. But further, she felt as an estranged lover that Mary, as one of what Havelock Ellis classified as “inverts”, that “marriage in the normal sense would be suicidal and wicked for her”.³⁶ As I have outlined in chapter 2, in such a discourse as Foucault has argued, her perversity would result in degeneracy in her offspring. In another letter Violet echoes her brother’s views:

I consider all the French and Mrs Besant’s practices as an abomination, bringing marriage to the level of prostitution and only opening the door to unnatural wickedness (as indeed is almost statistically proved) of all kinds. Mary and her man have no right to tie themselves together; but if they insist upon doing so (recognizing as they openly do that they would be criminal in producing children) let them honourably bear the difficulties and bitterness of their false position, without giving way to instincts whose natural result would be criminal.³⁷

Gardner suggests that here “she has resorted to terms of universal moralistic objurgation to denounce what in reality is merely her jealously anguished personal vision of the ‘abomination’ of Mary’s copulation”.³⁸ Her opposition to the match may have had its

motives primarily in personal jealousy, for it was clearly deeply felt beyond objective ideological principles; she had a nervous collapse and was ill for two years afterwards, and attributed this to her separation from Mary and the Darmesteter marriage. Her objections to contraception and to the Darmesteters having children as a criminal act are hardly universal morals, but are specifically eugenic arguments about the legal right of the congenitally crippled to have children. It is not possible to address the full and complex personal, biographical dimensions of this event here; I wish to draw attention to her use of eugenic discourse to insist on preserving Mary's "moral dignity" as a significant real instance of her aesthetic theory applied to questions of the reproduction of the "deformed" as unfit.³⁹

Yet in Lee's fiction, eugenic certainties are all but dispelled; but before turning to her short supernatural stories in greater detail, I want to preface them by briefly distinguishing how Vernon Lee's use of the Hellenistic concept of androgyny might support a nineteenth-century feminist critique in which Lee can be seen to be participating in a strand of New Woman feminism. In a manner after Pater, Lee identified and celebrated the Hellenism of the Renaissance, reworking its symbols both in her essay writing and in her fiction; but her deployment of Hellenistic symbols also participated in feminist rhetoric on sexual politics.

Lee wrote the prefatory essay to the English publication of feminist Charlotte Perkins Stetson's book *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (1898),⁴⁰ a book which Lee claims was responsible for her "conversion to the importance of the Woman Question".⁴¹ In this essay 'The Economic Parasitism of Women' published with the less feminist inflected title as 'Economic Dependence of Women' in the *North American* in 1902⁴² and

republished in her collection *Gospels of Anarchy and Other Contemporary Studies* (1908),⁴³ summarising the argument of Stetson's text, the key observation for Lee in Stetson's argument is conveyed in her phrase: "[w]omen are over-sexed".

Lee fully participates in Stetson's notion that women are wrongly relegated to a parasitism based fundamentally on their female sexual functions rather than to citizenship. Cynical and astute in her analysis, Lee is strongly condemnatory of the patriarchal myth of the eternal feminine which she identifies in particular with the French literary construct of "*La Femme*" and its operation in the decadent prose of the French playwright Dumas *filis* in which Lee sees the misogynist formulation of the threat of female sexuality:

[a]gainst this danger man must eternally struggle; the creature made in God's image must be saved from this diseased piece of its own flesh. [...] One feels all through this laughing cynicism a sort of priestly rage at the impossibility of finding out some better mode of continuing the race, at the impossibility of thoroughly getting rid of this constant disgrace and danger.⁴⁴

Lee ends on a provocative suggestion for the identity of the New Woman in the future. She sees her as occupying a position of social, legal and economic symmetry with man. As many New Woman commentators envisaged, Lee opines that woman's new status would produce a new sex; rather than a "third sex" of effeminate men or unwomanly women, the sexes will evolve together to create a "family resemblance" which is neither, collapsing binary oppositions. For Pater, a vigorous androgyny had characterised the greatness of classical civilisation in Greek sculptural art and he was fascinated by the

sexual indeterminacy he saw such figures representing. Lee's woman of the future clearly links fitness and aesthetics with an image of androgyny drawn from ancient Greece:

[a]nd since I have used the word image, and have alluded to the grace and beauty, or the gracelessness and ugliness, of the women of the future, let me remind Mrs. Stetson's readers that it is just the most æsthetic, but also the most athletic and the most intellectual, people of the past which has left us those statues of gods and goddesses in the presence of whose marvellous vigour and loveliness we are often in doubt whether to give the name of Apollo, or that of Athena.⁴⁵

Fitness is not associated with the cherished Victorian identities of virile masculinity and the femininity of the "womanly woman" but with that which exceeds the values of the heterosexual dichotomy of man/woman; an ideal of beauty that might problematise the reductionist economy of eugenics in particular. Such literary contexts, in which Lee acts as editor to the work of such an internationally recognised suffragist and feminist writer as Stetson, remind us that Lee situated herself in fields which enabled a fruitful dialogue between New Woman and other cultural criticism.

If literary decadence as a movement was "both a revolt against some of the programs of romanticism and a continuation of others",⁴⁶ then the gothic was one aspect of romanticism which it pursued. In 'The Conversations with Eckermann' Goethe had said "I call the classic the healthy, and the romantic the diseased..... Most of the "new" is not romantic because it is new, but because it is weak, sickly, and ill";⁴⁷ in this antithesis between the classic and the romantic at the fin de siècle, decadence, as a reaction to the "healthy" hegemonic cultural discourse, was allied with the romantic. Arthur Symonds in

his article 'The Decadent Movement in Literature' (1893) welcomed decadence as "a new and beautiful and interesting disease";⁴⁸ this metaphor might describe the action of the perverse on the spiritually and morally healthy, pure cultural body as it contaminated stable categories; one facet of this gothic perversity was a fascination with androgyny.

Writers since the 1860s had been fascinated by the darker side of the Renaissance, and had eroticised the mystic gothic spirit of the femme fatale of the sixteenth century. J. B. Bullen draws attention to the way in which Pater characterised the Mona Lisa as representing aesthetic values associated with the "romantic".⁴⁹ In his essay on Leonardo Da Vinci in *The Renaissance*, Pater had contrasted the beauty of La Gioconda, which he considered to be Da Vinci's masterpiece, with the "white Greek Goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity" remarking how they "would be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed!"⁵⁰ Lady Lisa is a composite soul in whom "the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the mysticism of the middle age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias [...] like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave".⁵¹ This dark, erotic and gothic spirit of beauty a species apart from the blithe beauty of the healthy and wholesome in Pater's inflection of the romantic gothic informs Vernon Lee's constructions of her ghostly female protagonists in the supernatural stories of *Hauntings*: 'Oke of Okehurst', 'Amour Dure' and 'Dionea'. The uses of myth in these stories undermine contemporary, Hebraic, cultural orthodoxies on women's role, and the identity of "the feminine". In 'Dionea', historicism – in this case, Hellenism – is used to question the moral orthodoxies of the present, and myth is presented as a cultural repository or locus for that which is absent or repressed from the modern condition. The recovery of the past, of history, will be a troubling exercise: it recovers the body, the

physical materiality of desire. The androgynous ghosts of Lee's fantastic tales do not chill, but warm the blood, they are objects of erotic desire, inspiring in others not terror, but desires which are unorthodox, decadent and disruptive.

The characteristically androgynous spectre of Lee's ghost stories, may in its "perversity", be read as a configuring of the lesbian. Writing of the literary history of lesbianism, Terry Castle has connected spectrality with the representation of lesbian desire. Castle finds a lesbian aesthetic in fiction which, in representing the spectral lesbian, delights in the confounding of "phantasmatic" with "real", whereas art which makes a distinction between these two ontological states in its representation of same-sex desire, and withholds the embodiment of the revenant, she describes as "classically homophobic".⁵² States of displacement, alterity, estrangement are typically the "real" for the female subject of lesbian fiction because these states describe subject positions outside the normative roles of a patriarchal and heterosexual order, thus the real becomes through a number of stylistic effects, typically formalised in the fantastic spectre and a ghostly world, distorted and estranged in, Castle argues, "a phantasmagoric way".⁵³ Although Lee's stories do not ostensibly depict female to female desire, indeed, the ghosts are often male, they nonetheless express an androgynous eroticism which evades, challenges or destroys the male gaze and its controlling sexual economy, so that we might read some of the phantasmic encounters in *Hauntings* as a sort of displacement of lesbianism.

The literary market during the 1880s and 90s was flooded with narratives of spirits, and phantoms. For Dr Max Nordau in his highly influential book *Degeneration* first published in English in 1895, ghost stories numbered amongst the many degenerate entertainments of the decadent society: "[g]host stories are very popular, but they must

come on in scientific disguise, as hypnotism, telepathy, somnambulism”⁵⁴ wrote Nordau, proclaiming the association between the unhealthiness of decadence and the vogue for the “scientising” of the supernatural occurring on the scientific fringe within theosophy, spiritualism, occultism as well as the more orthodox disciplines of hypnotism and psychical research.⁵⁵ Lee too distanced her tales from the popular scientific writing on ghosts, and in so doing defines the cultural capital of her ghost stories in the shared fields in cultural production of literary and scientific ghost stories.

In a recent article on Vernon Lee’s aestheticism, Angela Leighton comments on the haunting of aestheticism’s works of art for art’s sake by their materiality, and the ways in which aestheticism has been seen by recent criticism to be complicit with the commodity culture in which, even as it disavows the use value of works of art, they are reified as absolute commodities. Leighton suggests that, “the idea of the commodity thus short-cuts from the precious, ‘spectral’ rarefactions of aestheticism to its ‘densely corporeal’ investments.”⁵⁶ She argues however that to presume the complete ideological complicity of Victorian aestheticism in this dialectic is to miss how self-consciously it put the tension of this difference into view and opened up this space in playful critique.

The commodity value of the short story, and of the popular genre of the ghost story in particular, in the literary market, is negotiated in a position-taking by Lee through the distinction between intellectual ghosts and the gross materiality of the ghosts of what she calls, “semi-science”. In the introduction to *Hauntings* Lee gently mocks the “genuine” ghost stories of the “modern ghost experts” of the Society for Psychical Research – a group whose associations with spiritualism kept them on the fringe of respectable orthodox science, and thus a target of scepticism and scorn – ⁵⁷ whose proceedings of scientific experiments tell of uneventful, rather banal hauntings:

[a]ltogether one quite agrees, having duly perused the collection of evidence on the subject, with the wisdom of these modern ghost-experts, when they affirm that you can always tell a genuine ghost-story by the circumstance of its being about a nobody, its having no point or picturesqueness, and being, generally speaking, flat, stale, and unprofitable.⁵⁸

Her own “spurious” ghosts are “born of ourselves”, the result of historical researches, intellectual intrigues and the psychological associations of “certain brains”. As elite ghosts of the imagination they have no place in the crude empiricism of whether ghosts actually exist, and one suspects, of the crude, commercial and intellectually dubious enterprise which accompanies it.

In her essay on the supernatural in *Belcaro*, tracing the history of the supernatural in society and its replacement by anthropomorphic Christian and Classical art forms which represent the divine in human form, Lee pits the mystico-logical system of Christianity against the vitality of the imagination itself. The supernatural divinity, rather than representing the atavistic vestige of earlier cultures and civilisation to be superseded and bettered by classical forms, remains, Lee argues, a vital part of the imagination – “a something pleasing and terrible”⁵⁹ – of intellectual curiosity and gothic pleasure. The supernatural is linked with the perception of children:

[w]e moderns seek in the world of the supernatural a renewal of the delightful semi-obscurity of vision and keenness of fancy of our childhood [...] that delight, that

delusory imaginative pleasure which we received as children from a tawdry engraving or a hideous doll.⁶⁰

With their rational, discriminating, scientific gaze the Victorians have become estranged from the beliefs of that “childhood of mankind”, the Middle Ages, and Lee offers a return to such an aesthetic rooted in the romantic primitivism of the gothic in her tales.

In contrast to the “sickness of the prosaic”, a will to the fantastic is the manifestation of healthiness. These hauntings express the desires that are excluded by the terms of the healthy and disease, lust and love, pure and perverse, beauty and ugliness imagined by Allen, for example. The ghosts signify that which cannot be made “pure” or healthy, they contaminate their desiring subjects. Contamination could stand as a trope for the nature of association itself, which links, in the unconscious, otherwise separate categories and dichotomies, and contaminates ontologies. The categories of ugly and beautiful were polluted by the action of association, its processes exceed and escape trajectories for that which was evolutionarily or biologically useful, organically growing over and between binaries. With the supposition that the artistic endeavour at rendering the supernatural must, with its drive for form, inevitably exorcise its evasive impressionistic essence, Lee’s *Hauntings* trace the associations in the mind at “liberty”, the free play of impressions on the memory and imagination. The stories, particularly ‘Dionea’ – a reworking of the Pygmalion myth – depict a quest for “life” versus “art” and confront the possibility of approaching the “real” through representation when the representation will always seek to contain as it identifies, in accordance with social values and ideals.

All the women configured here represent the threat which the New Woman posed and science sought to contain; they undermine the stable masculine ego and rouse the primitive sexual urges which men would seek to repress. Each story has an image or representation at its centre and variously presents the role of the male gaze in the construction of the feminine subject. Is the archetype of female beauty real or constructed? In these stories, in contrast to the more ideologically circumscribed literary and historical discourses of her “highbrow” essays, Lee links visual and sexual economies; her embodied model of seeing foregrounds the sexual investments, as well as agency, of the observer. Her relationship to Paterian perspectives was conditioned by her own gender; in these stories, Lee examines the notion of the Otherness of women, an object of investigation for contemporary science, and places femininity beyond the logical, rational explanations of the evolutionary biologist or the sexologist.

‘Oke of Okehurst, or the Phantom Lover’ first published as *A Phantom Lover: A Fantastic Story* in 1886,⁶¹ illustrates Lee’s notion of the “lie of the land” in its layering of place, body, memory and the native, confusing distinctions between the innate and the acquired in identity. For Lee, the sense of place was deeply felt; a personal, lived one which permeated all her writing. In an essay in *Limbo* (1897) ‘The Lie of the Land’, Lee described the way in which a personal psychic map of associations and physical responses acted as the grounding for aesthetic perception of landscape, so that however the author or painter strains to convey their vision of the landscape, it will ultimately be determined by the reader/spectator. Our perception and evaluation of the beauty of a place is, Lee says, determined by hereditary preferences:

[y]es, lie of the land is what has mattered to us since we were children, to our fathers and remotest ancestors; ay, and its perception, the instinctive preference for one kind rather than another, is among the obscure things inherited with our blood, and making up the stuff of our souls.⁶²

This example of the action of association incorporates the late nineteenth-century notion of “organic memory”, the conflation of ancestral and individual’s memory as a function of heredity made in evolutionary psychology, for example by the French biologist Thèodule H. Ribot in his book *Heredity* (1875) where he argued that heredity *is* memory. These discourses enter into the framework of interpretation in this story, but they are not resolved into a consistent explanation. Lee’s representative codes mean that the spectres or their lovers cannot be contained within the totalising narratives of evolutionism, as for example Allen sought to do. This text creates both resistance and capitulation to evolutionary discourses on beauty, mental and moral health.

Unlike so many of Lee’s other fantastic tales which are set in the Renaissance of the Mediterranean, ‘Oke of Okehurst’ (‘OO’) is set in England although its ghosts are from the Jacobean period.⁶³ For this reason, Horace Gregory unfortunately omits this story from his edited collection of Lee’s short stories, *The Snake Lady and Other Stories* (1954), yet it has considerable continuity with her other stories in Italian and European settings. Like Pater’s essays in *The Renaissance* amongst which the eighteenth-century scholar Winckelmann figures, the Renaissance is a spirit rather than located in a strict geography, temporality, or chronology. The displacement of identity from and identification with spatial, geographic and cultural elements of the past to that of the hereditary past is a significant disjuncture in this story.

The narrator is a painter who was commissioned to paint the married cousins, William and Alice Oke of Okehurst's portraits whilst staying at their country seat, a Jacobean manor house in Kent.⁶⁴ His painting like the tale is a chronicling of family history, yet the enigmatic and beautiful Alice Oke evades signification; the painter makes many sketches, but cannot complete her portrait. This woman is immersed in her family history through an identification with her ancestress Alice Oke of the seventeenth century to whom we are told she bears a strong resemblance. This historical couple befriended Christopher Lovelock, the Court poet to king Charles I, who became Alice's lover. According to legend, Nicholas Oke, accompanied by his groom, had attempted to kill Lovelock but his shot missed, and the groom intervened, shooting Lovelock dead, and revealed herself as Alice Oke. However, after his wife's act of saving his life, Nicholas descends into madness, threatening to kill her, and lays a curse of childlessness on the future generations of the Okehurst family. The modern Alice taunts her husband, the dull but devoted William, with her growing obsession until he becomes ill and hysterical. On thinking he sees her phantom lover Lovelock in the yellow room with her, he shoots and kills her. Soon after he becomes insane and dies.

The narrator, recalling the events for a friend as he shows some of his sketches from his time at Okehurst, early confesses a profound admiration for Alice Oke and her extreme beauty which is "exquisite and uncanny" ('OO' 110) and has "an artificial perverse sort of grace" ('OO' 109) – words which evoke a gothic, Paterian charm – which lies in her movement rather than something which can be represented in his drawing: "[y]ou see she isn't really handsome [...] This gives no idea of her" ('OO' 109). Further, his belief that she was "[t]he most marvellous creature, quite, that I have ever met" ('OO' 109) combined with his extravagant claim that "I doubt whether any one ever

understood Alice Oke besides myself” (‘OO’ 110) alert us to his personal, subjective involvement with his subject. As Ruth Robbins has noted,⁶⁵ these gaps between the acts of perception and representation and their psychic and emotional investments are clearly highlighted in his admission that the events seem “like a thing of my own imagination” which strongly hints at a collapse between the real and the fantastic. Alice’s beauty, and the identity which turns on it, are to be problematised through the formal device of the unreliable narrator, and the subjective investments of the painterly gaze. We learn that his commissioned portrait of her remains incomplete; the effort to gain mastery over her identity has failed, a metaphorical figure for the fantastic which mocks the attempt to reduce complexities to a master narrative, such as science, or, indeed, Art.

Alice’s associations with androgyny in her looks and flouting of feminine norms of dress and behaviour mark her beauty and sexuality out as perverse. In a game of charades, when the family chests of clothing from the previous three centuries are raided to costume the party guests, amongst the masqueraders there emerges “a boy, slight and tall, in a brown riding-coat, leathern belt, and big buff boots, a little grey cloak over one shoulder, a large grey hat slouched over the eyes, a dagger and pistol at the waist”(‘OO’ 165); it is Alice in the character of the murderess as the groom, cross dressing both in terms of class and gender. Her choice of costume – “ [i]t is the dress in which an ancestress of ours, my namesake Alice Oke, used to go out riding with her husband in the days of Charles I”(‘OO’ 165) – at this moment also raises the spectre of Alice’s criminal deviance, the scene of the murder where she assumed the identity of her husband’s groom. The perversity of wearing masculine attire is a challenge to the master of the house: “there is something questionable in the sudden appearance of a young married woman, the mistress of the house, in a riding-coat and jack-boots” (‘OO’ 165). Assuming

authority while in a socially subordinate role of the groom, the original Alice's rescue of her husband from Lovelock's rapier is an emasculating act which we see repeated in the effects of the masquerade on the behaviour of William. The extent of the transgressive nature of this act is indicated by the way in which it precipitates her husband's descent into madness; the narrator observes that William "was growing perfectly unstrung, like a hysterical woman".⁶⁶

In tracing the fall of a house or historic family the tale employs a popular Gothic trope, and raises fin-de-siècle concerns with health and fitness. A layering of social, biological and supernatural explanations compete in the reading of Alice Oke's perverse morality, and the Okehurst's tragedy. The narrative shifts between illustrating how enervating Mrs Oke's life is – childless, half invalid, bored and isolated, her fantastic dreaming is a product of her social circumstances – to suggestions of the Okes historical decline, the exhaustion of a "race" is symptomatic of degeneracy.

Alice's androgynous and atavistic beauty contrasts with the "wholesome pink and white and blond conventionality"('OO' 129) of the former lieutenant and sportsman's healthy, strapping masculine beauty. "Unwomanly", even to the point of being disembodied – the narrator wonders: "I never thought about her as a body -- bones, flesh, that sort of thing; but merely as a wonderful series of lines"('OO' 122) – if she does have sexual relations with her husband, their marriage has been unproductive. The reproductive failure of miscarriage and sterility were for degenerationists, characteristic proofs of the regressive "line".

Alice Oke believes herself to resemble the portrait of her seventeenth-century ancestor, and carefully emulates her appearance by dressing in her original costume. But whether any true likeness exists in reality is problematised; the painter, investing this

comparison with his imagination: “[o]ne could fancy that this woman had the same walk [...] as her descendant”(‘OO’ 131), and the knowledge that they are related, colludes, and encourages her in this belief. The action of association completes any likeness between their images. Biological causes for the atrophy in Alice’s morality, perverse identification with the historical seductress/adulteress and murderer, and unwomanly, complete dismissal of her own husband, are offered by the narrative. Her “morbid curiosity” and “restlessness” may be part of her ancestry of Pomfret blood; William tells the painter how Alice Pomfret of a neighbouring county and “restless, self-seeking” family, had married into the Okes and sullied their “old, honourable, modest stock”(‘OO’ 135). Indeed, that the present-day Okes have spent their Norman vitality is signalled in the symptom of their childlessness; Alice has miscarried and nearly died afterwards. And the fact that the two are first cousins was also a risky factor in degeneration, such unions posed a concern for eugenic health, as Thomas Hardy would plot in *Jude the Obscure* in 1895.⁶⁷

Criminality had been pathologized as hereditary since the work of the French physician Morel in the 1860s and enjoyed greater development and dissemination through the work of Lombroso, Ribot, and Maudsley toward the end of the century. And there is some suggestion here that the madness and murder may also be hereditary. William Oke acts out the family tragedy of murder and madness which Nicholas Oke had before him. The painter on meeting William notes with a phrenologist’s curiosity “the only interesting thing about him -- a very odd nervous frown between his eyebrows, a perfect double gash,-- a thing which usually means something abnormal: a mad-doctor of my acquaintance calls it the maniac-frown”(‘OO’ 112), signals an incipient madness which recapitulates that of his ancestor.

Yet the narrative also offers a strongly social and cultural explanation for Mrs Oke's decadent manners and obsession, that "most extraordinary craze, of all the extraordinary crazes of childless and idle women"('OO' 138). Alice resembles some of the upper-class women of Lee's *Vanitas*, "hot house creatures" who are reduced to invalidism and dubious morality by their domestic confinement and parasitic existence on their husband's or inherited wealth, a subject of prose shared with many New Woman writers. As the narrator says:

I am tempted to think that the psychological peculiarity of that woman might be summed up in an exorbitant and absorbing interest in herself – a Narcissus attitude – curiously complicated with a fantastic imagination, a sort of morbid day-dreaming, all turned inwards, and with no outer characteristic save a certain restlessness, a perverse desire to surprise and shock, to surprise and shock more particularly her husband, and thus be revenged for the intense boredom which his want of appreciation inflicted upon her.⁶⁸

Lee's exposition of the belief in the supernatural in *Belcaro* identifies its origin in the experience of the persecuted and oppressed. The action of the supernatural in the present serves to "replace this uncertainty of vision, this liberty of seeing in things much more than there is which compensated the Middle Ages for starvation and pestilence and compensates the child for blows and lessons, it is to replace this that we crave after the supernatural, the ghostly – no longer believed but still felt".⁶⁹ The ghostly acts as a form of psychic compensation in a cultural economy in which the real, the logical, is valued. We might see the supernatural acting as a form of compensation for Alice against the

boredom of her confined life and marriage; the spectres, Alice or Lovelock, it is suggested, may be a symptom or effect of her disaffection. The result is ambiguous.

‘Amour Dure: Passages from the Diary of Spiridion Trepka’, first published in *Murray’s Magazine* (1887) is set in modern day Urbania, Italy. The diary entries of the young Polish Professor of History, Spiridion Trepka document his archival research on the noblewoman Medea da Carpi.⁷⁰ A mid-sixteenth century noblewoman of legendary beauty, she is the daughter of the Duke of Urbania and is “of the time of Lucrezia Borgia”, evoking legendary associations of corruption for the contemporary reader. The myth of Lucrezia Borgia in the nineteenth century had already been recreated in the decadent romanticism of the Pre-Raphaelites, Swinburne and other modern accounts which eroticised her immorality, incestuous relationships and corruption.⁷¹ Medea is involved in the assassinations of five of her husbands and lovers; she uses her bewitching beauty to make others commit murder for her in her struggle for power. Threatened by her determined ascent to power, and believing her to be a witch, the Duke Robert makes a statue in which he superstitiously secretes a silver effigy of his own soul as protection against the evil machinations of “la pessima Medea”. In the convent where he has incarcerated her, he has her put to death by those who will not succumb to her beauty; she is strangled by female assassins who are convicted infanticides.

A secret archive that Trepka discovers reveals letters and portraits of Medea as a red-haired beauty, of the type “most admired by the late Renaissance”; she has a “curious, at first rather conventional, artificial-looking sort of beauty [...] the more it is contemplated, the more it troubles and haunts the mind”. Further to the “curious” nature of her beauty – a key decadent term – the promise of a “sinister seductiveness” (‘AD’ 18) in her gothic beauty is emblematised in her adornment, a necklace engraved “Amour

Dure, Dure Amour” – love that lasts, cruel love – a motto which configures the fate of her “slavish” lovers doomed to death. Finding only “degeneracy” (‘AD’ 21) in the shrill voice and gaudy toilettes of Italian women, the young historian becomes infatuated with the image of Medea and the horror of her career is made over in his dedication to her service. With the appearance of objects from the past, letters written to him, apparently from Medea, and a rose, the boundaries between art and life are blurred. He composes and sings a love poem to her, an incantation which finally seems to summon her apparition; and then goes to meet her in a derelict church inhabited by a ghostly, sixteenth century congregation, where she assigns him the destruction of Duke Robert’s effigy. The threat of imminent death in order to gain her love, the fate of all her lovers, only spurs him on; a final note informs the reader that the local press has reported how the destroyed statue of Robert II has been discovered, as has the corpse of Spiridion Trepka, stabbed through the heart.

Two recent studies have highlighted how the portraits in ‘Amour Dure’ are Paterian, specifically evoking Pater’s treatment of *La Gioconda*. Ruth Robbins had noted how exactly they map onto the enigmatic and ambiguous features which Pater idealised in the art of Leonardo da Vinci, and the ways in which, like Pater’s reading, they are subjectively interpreted and “felt” by the viewer.⁷² Christa Zorn has suggested that the story can be read as an “animated version” of Pater’s portrayal of the image; yet while it evokes it, it is simultaneously a “deconstruction” in which Lee “undoes Pater’s fusion of aesthetic object (the image) and subject (the historian) as she places both into their specific historical conditions”.⁷³ My own position is that Lee does not seek to “undo” this fusion – which as I have discussed in Lee’s treatment of associationism, is fundamentally at the bottom of all aesthetic perception – but rather illuminates these processes of

contextualisation and internalisation and how they are created by the viewer, within the economy of the gothic. These gothic states run counter to the desire for concrete historicity; the terrible pleasure of the gothic in which Lee, and her reader, delights, lies in the dizzying loss of distinction between the phantasmic and the real which arises from this relationship between viewer and object. What it does here is to point up the gothic economy in which the “past” and the “present”, the “mythic” and the “real”, are always under contestation.

The authorial voice seems to slip in and out of identification with Trepka; Lee endorses Trepka’s viewpoint when he derides the scientific empiricism of historicism and its insistence on historical truth and authenticity. A Bavarian Professor visiting Trepka and advising him on his research, is slyly ridiculed; Trepka scorns how he

condescended to answer that those were the usual tales due to the mythopoeic (old idiot!) tendency of the Renaissance; that research would disprove the greater part of them, as it had disproved the stories current about the Borgias, &c.; that, moreover, such a woman as I made out was psychologically and physiologically impossible (‘AD’ 30).

In contrast to this “[d]ryasdust” (‘AD’ 8) professor, the Polish Trepka idealises a romantic past, and his desires breathe life into the dust of the past. In his quest for the “real”, approached through the image of the woman, the real becomes an impossibility, evading his control.

The historian’s erotic alliance with the past formulates a sympathetic if exulted picture of Medea as subject to male domination and violence in an exchange system

amongst the highest powers in Urbania. The Duke Robert turns, in this light, from being to Trepka a “a hero” to a “cunning, cold but craven priest” and “old pedant”. Trepka notes that Medea, this “woman of superlative beauty, of the highest courage and calmness, a woman of many resources, of genius” (‘AD’ 23) is an educated princess who can “read Plato as well as Petrarch”(‘AD’ 26) yet she is to become the powerless object of disputes over land and power and humiliatingly abducted and forced into marriage with a man three times her age. Lee asks the reader to:

[r]eflect what that means: it means that this imperious woman is soon treated like a chattel, made roughly to understand that her business is to give the Duke an heir, not advice; that she must never ask ‘wherefore this or that?’ that she must courtesy before the Duke’s counsellors, his captains, his mistresses; that, at the least suspicion of rebelliousness, is subject to his foul words and blows; at the least suspicion of infidelity, to be strangled or starved to death, or thrown down an oubliette (‘AD’ 24).

It is only because of his desires for Medea that he understands the historical limitations in which her subjectivity is circumscribed as a woman whose search for power, influence and money amongst male rulers in a society dominated by religious powers, would make her beauty supernaturally evil. Yet Trepka’s desires participate in the same cultural constructions of patriarchal mythmaking. Although Lee uses Trepka to voice a sympathetic male vindication of a woman’s history, she nonetheless ultimately condemns the haunted historian to destruction by his spectral lover.

The retelling of the myth of Pygmalion was popular during the end of the nineteenth century,⁷⁴ depicting as it did the triumph of Nature over Culture. In ‘Dionea’,

Vernon Lee uses the myth to criticise the notion of the Ideal in beauty and analyse the role of the masculine gaze in constituting the female subject as commodity, a critical exposition which participates in the morals of New Woman social and moral purists. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Pygmalion was the king of Cyprus, a sculptor who fell in love with the life-like ivory statue he had created. He prayed to the goddess Aphrodite to give him a wife resembling the Feminine ideal, and the goddess brought his statue, Galatea, to life.

In 'Dionea' the letters of a physician Dr. Alessandro living on Cyprus to Lady Evelyn Savelli Princess of Sabina tell of the adoption into the community of a fugitive child whom they name Dionea, washed up from the sea, believing her to be shipwrecked from a Greek ship. A sculptor Waldemar and his wife Gertrude visit this village and Waldemar sets up a studio on the old site of the temple of Venus and has Dionea pose as his model for a statue of the goddess, Venus. After borrowing a miniature ancient altar from the doctor on which he makes his prayers to the goddess, the cliff top studio is discovered burnt to the ground, Waldemar's wife's body dead on an altar, and the sculptor's body dead on the shore below. Dionea has vanished, and is later sighted by a fisher-boy at the prow of a Greek ship sailing out to sea.

As Dione – the Titan mother of Aphrodite, associated with rose, myrtle and doves – Dionea is a magical and mythical figure whose spell of Hellenism, a spirit of passionate and erotic love, disrupts the local community. The narrator, physician to the convent, is writing a book on the "Exiled Gods", which is never finished, ironically because he claims that reality is too prosaic. As Eileen Gregory has suggested of *The Renaissance*,⁷⁵ the theme of exiled gods was a popular one with which Victorian writers had represented the Hellenism they saw as lacking in their culture.⁷⁶ Lee's Dionea, the

living woman, is again linked to the Mona Lisa; as a Romantic figure with “a still odder smile, tortuous, serpentine, like that of Leonardo da Vinci’s women, among the plaster images of St. Francis” (‘Dionea’ 72) she is explicitly associated with the “animalism of Greece” which Pater admired.

The archetypal mythical figure of the snake goddess⁷⁷ is evoked in the depiction of Dionea as a “snake woman”.⁷⁸ The snake woman who has her most detailed exposition in Lee’s short story ‘Prince Alberic and the Snake Woman’ in the *Yellow Book* is read as the “phallic woman” in various ways by Burdett Gardner, Ruth Robbins and Jane Hotchkiss.⁷⁹ The fantastically beautiful Dionea has a “smile (her lips like a Cupid’s bow or a tiny snake’s curves)” (‘Dionea’ 76) which she displays with moments of disruption in the story; on hearing of the death of the lovesick priest Father Domenico she sings a “strange chaunt”, “raising her head with that smile like the twist of a young snake” (‘Dionea’ 79) and when she is accused of being a witch with her love philters she “only smiled, that snake-like, amused smile, but more ominous than of yore” (‘Dionea’ 87).⁸⁰ Agreeing to model for the sculptor, “Dionea raised her head with that serpentine smile. ‘I will come,’ she said” (‘Dionea’ 92). The snake imagery is linked to the power of her sexuality and magic, that which exists and extends its potency beyond social, patriarchal confines. When the old man Sor Agostino tries to molest Dionea she punishes his transgression by striking him dead with lightning. The love potions she makes produce disruptive forces, they undo social conventions; matches made by families for convenience are rebelled against, equally, true loves are broken and renegade nuns run off to sea with sailors.

Lee criticises the kind of physical female beauty which represents an aesthetically hence socially desirable femininity, frail, pale, ill or melancholic. This ideal characterises

some of the pre-Raphaelite school, for example, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's paintings of Elizabeth Siddall as a melancholy, consumptive invalid, Elizabeth Bronfen has argued, eroticise Siddall's ethereality of a state near death, as an ideal of feminine beauty.⁸¹ Lee's aesthetics and feminist sympathies fuse in her condemnation of the misogyny of the view of women as Schopenhauer's "unaesthetic sex". The narrator complains that the sculptor Waldemar does not sculpt women: "[b]ut why among these statues only men and boys, athletes and fauns? Why only the bust of that thin delicate-lipped little Madonna wife of his? Why no wide-shouldered Amazon or broad-flanked Aphrodite?" ('Dionea' 84). The resounding physicality of these descriptions express the desire for the representation of the healthy athletic, and of course, androgynous, sculptures of hellenic art as opposed to the languishing women of Rossetti.

With their reference to Greek sculpture they resonate with Lee's aesthetic, erotic preferences expressed, for example, in her comparison of Kit Anstruther Thomson, whom she describes as sculptural, with the Venus de Milo.⁸² Alessandro discovers the sculptor's embodiment of his ideal aesthetic is male: "the female figure he says [...] is almost inevitably inferior in strength and beauty; woman is not form, but expression, and therefore suits painting but not sculpture. The point of a woman is not her body but (and here his eye rested very tenderly upon the thin white profile of his wife) her soul" ('Dionea' 90). The narrator, who speaks for Lee, quips sarcastically, "[s]till, [...] the ancients, who understood such matters, did manufacture some tolerable female statues: the Fates of the Parthenon, the Phidian Pallas, the Venus of Milo" ('Dionea' 90).

Vernon Lee's objection to masculine discourses of purity participates in the ethics of the social purists. The male doctor (a character also deployed to good effect as an

authoritative voice on morality by Sarah Grand in *The Heavenly Twins*) voices these arguments in a letter to Lady Evelyn:

[h]as it ever struck your Excellency [...] that not merely maternal but conjugal unselfishness may be a very selfish thing? [...] I have heard you say that *other* women may think it right to humour their husbands, but as to you, the Prince must learn that a wife's duty is as much to chasten her husband's whims as to satisfy them. I really do feel indignant that such a snow white saint should wish another woman to part with all instincts of modesty merely because that other woman would be a good model for her husband; really it is intolerable ('Dionea' 91).

The economy in which a wife is "unselfish" to her husband in aiding his whims, in this case finding an object of lust for Waldemar, will implicate her in the selfishness of compromising other women's purity.

Lee examines the woman's collusion in the "virgin/ whore" dichotomy of woman so dear to male aestheticists; Gertrude, the sculptor's wife, contributes to her husband's fashioning of female beauty and subjectivity, implicating the female gaze within this dialectic. In order to serve her representation as the ideal, another type of woman must be created who is that which she is not, her Other is the working village girl. Other women maintain their purity through sacrificing other women to men's desires; in a startling image the narrator presents Gertrude that "snow white saint" as a "pale, demure diaphanous creature not the more earthly for approaching motherhood, scanning the girls of our village with the eyes of a slave dealer" ('Dionea' 90). By looking for a girl whom her husband can gaze on and by implication, have sexual congress with, she preserves her

own identity as “soul-ful”. Significantly, the pregnant Gertrude is the most ghostly figure in the story, pale and white, all soul, she is apparently bodiless. The authorial condemnation of this sexual economy participates in the condemnation by social-purity feminists of the hypocrisy of the middle-class marriage contracted in the market place, and the cultural construction of the feminine as the Madonna – ethereal, disembodied yet simultaneously maternal – ideal.

Coming under Dionea’s thrall he realises that her natural beauty is greater than his art, and thus poses a threat to the male creator, whose representation cannot contain her. When the sculptor has to realise defeat and admit that the living woman Dionea is more beautiful than his art can make her he becomes “unmanned”: “that odd spark of ferocity dilated in his eyes, and seizing the largest of his modelling tools, he obliterated at one swoop the whole exquisite face. Poor Gertrude turned ashy white, and a convulsion passed over her form”(‘Dionea’ 96). His reaction to the loss of control that the male fantasy of giving life to woman offered him, is to make an attack on the statue which is encoded as sexual, corporeal violence, and this action is registered in the living woman Gertrude’s face and body. Waldemar cannot “feel the divineness of the mere body” when that body is female. In deploring an aesthetics which cannot find in women’s corporeal beauty also spiritual beauty comparable to the male, Lee is already expressing the feminist critique of the notion of *La Femme* which she expounds in her essay on the economic parasitism of women, in which she finds men in fear and loathing of the power of female sexuality.

Vernon Lee’s work participates in, and is influenced by forces from, a variety of literary fields: decadence, aestheticism and New Woman feminism. These networks of influence, I have demonstrated, meant that being a female aesthete or decadent did not

necessarily entail the exclusion of feminist values from prose. As Talia Schaffer suggests in her book *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* sharing some of the same publishers in fiction and the periodical presses, the same convictions over self-education, interested in new sexual moralities and gender definitions as well as questions of the representation of women in art, the differences between the New Women and the female aesthetes were often very little; but the female aesthetes rhetoric was ultimately largely removed from the polemical tone of the New Woman and her political feminist agenda, and they chose to participate in the terms of cultural production within the field of high-art.⁸³ Vernon Lee's use of aestheticist techniques and alliance with male aesthete figures like Wilde and Pater allowed her to win a greater measure of cultural capital and cultivate a style that was scholarly and belonged to high-status intellectual work rather than the journalism and defiant fiction of the New Woman.

Schaffer has pointed out, aestheticism “tended to attract precisely those writers whose gender ideas were in flux”⁸⁴; in the conservatism of her high-art field Lee distanced herself with gentle humour from the vigorous political commitments of what she saw as the notoriously unstylish “inevitable eccentric” at the vanguard of cultural reform. More damagingly, Lee implied that feminism from its more polemical New Woman representatives – “those disconnected and disjointed personalities who are attracted by every other kind of thing in *ism*”⁸⁵ – bore a martyrish aspect read by Lee as symptomatic of the inferiority associated with the will to power of a Nietzschean slave morality. She concedes that these protestors

whose power consists a little in their very inferiority; and whose abnormal and often morbid ‘pleasure in saying “No” ’(as Nietzsche puts it) is, after all, alas! alas! so very necessary in this world of quite normally stupid and normally selfish and normally virtuous ‘pleasure in saying “Yes.” ’ ... ⁸⁶

Lee was perhaps more closely engaged with evolutionary theories in her own research and writing than any of her other female contemporaries; her development of the theory of Associationism with its background in evolutionary psychology had quite far reaching implications for aesthetic theory and for cultural politics. Her handling of scientific discourses is characteristically ambiguous: deployed not to argue a political or social principle, it quietly bears upon the relationship between beauty, use and fitness, undoing the certainties of eugenics.

The tendencies of her aesthetic style, a fluid and meandering prose following its interconnecting trains of associations, leaves such explanations, in limbo. The fantastic opens up a space between the terms of morality, purity and perversity and what is beautiful in the culture; in Lee’s work, this enables a more complex and ambiguous conception of the relationship between the artist, the work and the reader/spectator, the role of art and the cultural producer in society, than the conclusive moral certainties which characterise didactic writers like Sarah Grand. These stories do not depict the New Women characters of realist novels in order to explore gender roles and criticise contemporary sexual morality and the hypocrisy of marriage, yet despite her avowed commitment to art for art’s sake, Lee also does this. As Schaffer argues of the female aesthetes, unlike the New Woman, they wrote and acted, “not to bear witness to the desperate need to expand women’s lives but precisely to question the value and the limits

of that expansion of female identity.”⁸⁷ And in imagining haunted and haunting women of beauty, they bespeak a simultaneous fascination with, and ambivalence about female power.

¹ Of the Woman Question Lee wrote, “I must begin by confessing that the question which goes by that name had never attracted my attention, or, rather, that I had on every occasion evaded and avoided it”, ‘The Economic Parasitism of Women’, *North American Review* 175 (July 1902): 71-90.

² *Woman’s Signal* (7 June 1894): 312.

³ Violet Paget quoted in Peter Gunn, *Vernon Lee: Violet Paget 1856-1935* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964): 106. Also in Burdett Gardner, *The Lesbian Imagination (Victorian Style): A Psychological and Critical Study of ‘Vernon Lee’* (New York: Garland, 1987): 376-7.

⁴ Kathy Alexis Psomiades has suggested that *Miss Brown* is a “lesbian text” on these grounds. See ‘“Still Burning from This Strangling Embrace”: Vernon Lee on Desire and Aesthetics’, *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*. Ed. Richard Dellamara (London: Chicago University Press, 1999): 21-41(28).

⁵ Carlo Caballero, ‘“A Wicked Voice”: On Vernon Lee, Wagner, and the Effects of Music’, *Victorian Studies* 35 (Summer, 1992): 385-408.

⁶ Ruth Robbins, ‘Vernon Lee: Decadent Woman?’, *Fin de Siècle/Fin du Globe: Fears and Fantasies of the Late Nineteenth Century*. Ed. John Stokes (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992): 139-61 (141).

⁷ Angela Leighton, ‘Ghosts, Aestheticism, and “Vernon Lee”’, *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2000): 1-14 (3).

⁸ Arthur Symons, ‘The Decadent Movement in Literature’, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (Nov. 1893) *Arthur Symons: Selected Writings*. Ed. Roger Holdsworth (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1989): 74.

⁹ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1873) *The 1893 Text*. Ed. Donald L. Hill (London: University of California Press, 1980): Preface, xx.

¹⁰ Vernon Lee, ‘The Lake of Charlemagne’, *Juvenilia: Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions Vol. I* (1881; London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887): 61.

¹¹ Ian Small, ‘Vernon Lee, Association and “Impressionist” criticism’, *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 17 (1977): 178-84.

¹² Grant Allen ‘Aesthetic Evolution in Man’, *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy* 20 (Oct. 1880): 447.

¹³ *Ibid*: 448.

¹⁴ Lee writes “[w]e seem to have got a good way in our explanation; and indeed the older psychology, for instance of the late Grant Allen, didn’t get any further. But to explain why a shape difficult to perceive should be disliked and called ‘ugly’, by no means amounts to explaining why some other shape should be liked and called ‘beautiful’, particularly as some ugly shapes happen to be far easier to grasp than some beautiful ones.” Vernon Lee, *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913): 52.

¹⁵ Kathy A. Psomiades notes that in comparison with Grant Allen, Kit Anstruther-Thomson and Vernon Lee’s physiological aesthetics are “far more egalitarian in their implications and far less darwinist (sic) in their claims [...] making [art] a human need, rather than a luxury for the leisured classes.” Kathy A. Psomiades, ‘“Still Burning from tis Strangling Embrace”: Vernon Lee on Desire and Aesthetics’, *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*. Ed. R. Dellamara (London: Chicago University Press, 1999): 21- 41(40). I would argue that aesthetic perception

for Allen was universal; he rated the cultural products and art of other civilisations highly as his many articles such as 'Carving a Coconut' and 'Pleased with a Feather' for the *Cornhill* attest, having a critical tendency to see art in relativist anthropological terms. The term "darwinist" here, needs some definition for this comparison to clarify their differences, although the implications of Lee's physiological aesthetics are certainly less deterministic and ideologically pointed than Allen's. See Grant Allen 'Carving a Coconut', *Cornhill Magazine*, 36 (Oct. 1877) : 461-472 and 'Pleased with a Feather', *Cornhill Magazine* 39 (June 1879): 712-722.

¹⁶ I agree with Small when he observes that "like Vernon Lee, Allen alleged that the aesthetic sense originated in the 'appreciation of the pure and healthy typical specific form' [...]. Similarly Vernon Lee's account of association described a sort of race memory, unconscious in its modes of operation whereby certain preferences manifested themselves at the level of conscious choice"(1977): 180.

¹⁷ Vernon Lee, *Beauty and Ugliness and Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics* (1897; London : John Lane, 1912): 12.

¹⁸ Ibid: 253.

¹⁹ Vernon Lee, 'The Lake of Charlemagne', *Juvenilia vol.1* (1887): 57.

²⁰ Vernon Lee and Clementina Anstruther-Thomson, *Beauty and Ugliness and Other Studies in Psychological Aesthetics* (1897; London: John Lane, 1911): 157.

²¹ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance, Studies in Art and Poetry* (1893): 187.

²² Vernon Lee, *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (1881; London: T.Fisher Unwin, 1887): 63.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Vernon Lee, 'Ruskinism', *Belcaro* (1887): 220.

²⁵ Ibid: 217.

²⁶ Ibid: 217.

²⁷ Vernon Lee, 'Ruskinism', *Belcaro* (1887): 207 .

²⁸ Ibid: 209.

²⁹ Ibid: 42.

³⁰ Hilary Fraser, 'Women and the Ends of Art History: Vision and Corporeality in Nineteenth-Century Critical Discourse', *Victorian Studies* 42: 1 (1998/99): 77-100 (94).

³¹ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (1893): 152.

³² Ibid: 152.

³³ Violet Paget to her mother, cited by Burdett Gardner, *The Lesbian Imagination (Victorian Style). A Psychological and Critical Study of "Vernon Lee"* (London: Garland, 1987): 181.

³⁴ Eugene Lee Hamilton to Violet Paget in Burdett Gardner, *The Lesbian Imagination* (1987): 187.

³⁵ Ibid: 185.

³⁶ Ibid: 184.

³⁷ Letter from Violet Paget (27 Sept.1887) cited in Burdett Gardner, *The Lesbian Imagination* (1987): 191.

³⁸ Ibid: 192.

³⁹ Eugenicist views also seem to have been turned back upon Eugene by Violet later on. In 1898, after twenty years of reputedly auto-suggested invalidism which confined him to a horizontal trolley by his mother's side, Eugene married and had a little girl who died in infancy. Violet is reported by Burdett in a letter to Eugene to have "opposed the conception, on the grounds of Eugene's peculiar unfitness contaminating 'the race' ". Burdett Gardner, *The Lesbian Imagination* (1987): 129.

⁴⁰ Charlotte Perkins Stetson (later Gilman) author of *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1899) and patient of American physician Weir Mitchell's infamous rest cure.

⁴¹ Vernon Lee, 'The Economic Parasitism of Women', *Gospels of Anarchy and Other Contemporary Studies* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908).

<http://www.indiana.edu/~letrs/vwwp/lee/gospels.html> (20 Aug 2001): 266.

⁴² Vernon Lee, 'Economic Dependence of Women', *North American* 175 (July 1902): 71-90.

⁴³ Vernon Lee, 'The Economic Parasitism of Women' (1908): 263-297.

⁴⁴ Ibid: 286.

⁴⁵ Ibid: 296.

⁴⁶ David Weir suggests this is the view of a number of recent critics on decadence. See David Weir, *Decadence and the Making of Modernism* (London: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995): 5.

⁴⁷ J. B. Bullen (1994) cites Pater's knowledge of the historical distinctions which Goethe had made between the romantic and the classical in art.

⁴⁸ Arthur Symons, 'The Decadent Movement in Literature', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (Nov. 1893). *Arthur Symons: Selected Writings*. Ed. Roger Holdsworth (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1989).

⁴⁹ J. B. Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994):290-292

⁵⁰ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (1893): 98.

⁵¹ Ibid: 98.

⁵² Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University, 1993): 56.

⁵³ Ibid: 90.

⁵⁴ Dr. Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (1892; 1895: First English ed. London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993): 14.

⁵⁵ Kit Anstruther-Thomson had written to Vernon Lee discussing Nordau's writing on aestheticism and morality in his article in the *Forum*. Cited in Burdett Gardner, *The Lesbian Imagination* (1987): 218.

⁵⁶ Angela Leighton, 'Ghosts, Aestheticism and "Vernon Lee"' (2000): 3.

⁵⁷ For further discussion of the status of spiritualism, see Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1983) and Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England 1850-1914* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1985).

⁵⁸ Vernon Lee, *Hauntings: Fantastic Stories* (London: Heinemann, 1890):10.

⁵⁹ Vernon Lee, *Belcaro* (1887): 94.

⁶⁰ Ibid: 96.

⁶¹ Vernon Lee, *A Phantom Lover: A Fantastic Story* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1886).

⁶² *Limbo and Other Essays* (London: Grant Richards, 1897): 47. (10 Sept. 1999). Victorian Women Writers Project Indiana University <http://www.indiana.edu/~letrs/vwwp/lee/limbo.html>.

⁶³ *Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady, A Wedding Chest, A Seeker of Pagan Perfection, The Virgin of the Seven Daggers* and the other stories discussed in this chapter are set in Italy, Cyprus or Spain.

⁶⁴ According to Gunn, the Oke house is based on the Swinford Old Manor of the Goddington estate near Ashford, where in 1885 Vernon Lee and Mary Robinson stayed with Alfred Austin editor of the *National Review*. Peter Gunn, *Vernon Lee* (1964).

⁶⁵ See Ruth Robbins, 'Apparitions can be deceptive: Vernon Lee's Androgynous Spectres', *Victorian Gothic*. Eds. Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000): 182-200.

⁶⁶ Ibid: 176.

⁶⁷ Concerns over marriage between cousins was expressed, for example, by J. F. Nisbet, *Marriage and Heredity: A View of Psychological Evolution* (1889). Distinguishing his novel from those on “the marriage question”, Hardy wrote to Edmund Gosse of *Jude*, “it is concerned secondly with the tragic issues of two bad marriages, owing in the main to a doom or curse of hereditary temperament peculiar to the family of the parties” (Nov. 10 1895). *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy Vol. 2. 1893-1901*. Eds. Richard L. Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980): 93.

⁶⁸ Vernon Lee, *Hauntings* (1890): 127.

⁶⁹ Vernon Lee, *Belcaro* (1887): 97.

⁷⁰ Linked to the transgressive figure in Greek mythology, Medea was an infanticidal mother and a sorceress who aided Jason in his quest for the golden fleece. When he abandoned her she killed his lover and her own children: his heirs.

⁷¹ J.B. Bullen, *The Myth of the Renaissance* (1994) documents how she was painted by Rossetti in a sensuous style. Swinburne’s narrative *The Chronicle of Theobaldi Tebaldi. Renaissance Period* told the story of Lucrezia Borgia by her young devoted lover in sensuous terms. If Lee condemned the “fleshly school” of the art of the pre-Raphaelites, she clearly shared some of their fascination with female beauty and moral decadence.

⁷² Ruth Robbins, ‘Apparitions can be deceptive: Vernon Lee’s Androgynous Spectres’ (2000): 182-200.

⁷³ Christa Zorn, ‘Aesthetic Intertextuality as Cultural Critique: Vernon Lee Rewrites History through Walter Pater’s “La Gioconda”’, *Victorian Newsletter* 91(Spring 1997): 4-10.

⁷⁴ Jane Thomas has examined literary and artistic treatments of the myth including Thomas Hardy’s novel *The Well Beloved*, the representations in Wilkie Collins *The Woman in White*, Burne Jones, William Morris and Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s paintings. See Jane Thomas, *Thomas Hardy, Femininity and Dissent: Reassessing the ‘Minor’ Novels* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

⁷⁵ See Eileen Gregory, *H. D. and Hellenism: Classic Lines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁷⁶ The Saint-Simonian Heinrich Heine had written an essay ‘The Gods in Exile’ which imagines the exile of the Olympians in the advent of Christianity *having to disguise themselves as ordinary mortals and live* among them, and of course Walter Pater had written about the return of the exiled gods in *The Renaissance*.

⁷⁷ The snake goddess in Greece belonged to the Minoan civilisation of 1600 B.C. Excavations of the palace at Knossos by Minos Kalokairinos started in the 1870s. These were assumed by the British archaeologist Arthur Evans in 1900.

⁷⁸ Freud made an analogy between the pre-Oedipal in female sexuality and the “Minoan-Mycenaean civilisations behind the civilisation of Greece”; the archaeological stratification with its analogous psycho-sexual stages – this “surprise discovery” – connects the pre-Oedipal with the power of phallic femininity. Sigmund Freud, ‘Female Sexuality’ (1931), *On Sexuality*. Ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1997): 372.

⁷⁹ For Jane Hotchkiss, this powerful pre-Oedipal figure of the phallic snake woman is specifically a “clitoral woman” whose sexuality has no “lack”, existing autonomously outside the patriarchal, phallocentric definitions and laws of heterosexual economies. See Jane Hotchkiss ‘(Pre)vising Freud: Vernon Lee’s Castration Phantasy’, ‘*Seeing Double*’: *Revisioning Edwardian and Modernist Literature*. Eds. Carola M. Kaplan and Anne B. Simpson (New York: St Martins Press, 1996).

⁸⁰ *Ibid*: 87.

⁸¹ For psychoanalytic cultural criticism of Rossetti’s paintings of Siddall within discussion of the representation of woman and death in art, see Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

⁸² Vernon Lee, *Beauty and Ugliness*: 204.

⁸³ See Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes, Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (London: University Press of Virginia, 2000): 1-33.

⁸⁴ Ibid: 5.

⁸⁵ Vernon Lee, *Gospels of Anarchy* (1908): 265.

⁸⁶ Ibid: 265.

⁸⁷ Ibid: 25.

Chapter 4

Verse or vitality?: evolution and the female poet.

In terms of cultural and symbolic capital, poetry had traditionally enjoyed a high prestige in the hierarchy of genres in the literary market. This was in part an outcome linked to its low economic profits, and in the 1890s limited editions and expensively bound and produced volumes increased the selectivity of this commodity. Such poetry was read by restricted audiences, and in Pierre Bourdieu's sense of an "economic world reversed", its low financial remuneration could enhance literary status or recognition, thus heightening symbolic power. Like the Victorian novel, poetry was a field where legitimate production was struggled over by critics and poets; because it is "the disinterested activity *par excellence*", Bourdieu suggests "its prestige, linked to the historical tradition initiated by the Romantics, is destined to charismatic legitimation which is given to only a few individuals".¹

Bourdieu in his discussion of the structure of literary fields in cultural production has suggested that poetry from the 1860s, as a field of restricted production, belonged to a "virtually closed circuit"² from the field of large scale production such as the Naturalist novel and thus has to be treated analytically as its own sub-field with its own structure and rules. Whilst there are clearly struggles over legitimacy specific to poetry as a genre rather than the novel, my discussion of women producers does not fit neatly into such an historical, structural overview of generic fields, as is evidenced by those who published both verse and fiction or prose (for example E. E. Nesbit, May Kendall, Alice Meynell). We might consider New Woman fiction to form a field of more limited production than Naturalism, in Bourdieu's example, but for the purposes of my analysis I treat the work

of women poets as a subfield of New Women writing: verse was another form of literary production for feminist expression. This chapter will examine it as a cultural intervention into the implications of evolutionary science for social structures and relationships.

In the first section of this chapter I consider approaches to the themes of struggle and sexual selection in evolutionary science and the natural world in the poetry of women writers such as Emily Pfeiffer, May Kendall and A. Mary F. Robinson. Some comparison with the “evolution” poetry of Grant Allen will be instructive in considering how science was popularised in poetics and how it contributed to discussion on the ethics of economic and social progress and the position of women. In the second section I consider the representation and cultural construction of Constance Naden and Amy Levy’s deaths as New Women in the context of scientific discourses on female education and ability. The study of women’s poetry, as a literary form steeped in the classical, is a focus for the discussion of a broader resistance to female education. Cultural appraisals of women poets do not draw on specific models of degeneration peculiar to poets, although poetry as a privileged intellectual genre might generate some specific discourses about genius in a manner in which novelists did not. The New Woman writer, whether poet or novelist, was subject to the same treatments of socio-scientific ideological critiques of higher education, which were anti-career and pro-motherhood. As I demonstrate throughout this study, these discourses were disseminated through various speakers and sites, and gained their power precisely through this diffusion.

Although earlier in the nineteenth century, women’s poetry had expressed awareness of the unethical treatment of disenfranchised people, such as slaves and the poor, critics trace a shift from the treatment of social concerns in a political poetics toward the development of an emotional register of affective poetry by women.³ Circumscribed

within the modes of expressive and affective poetry which produced appropriately feminine registers of personal feeling and sentiment, women's writing was criticised when it departed from these modes.⁴ Women poets were caught in a double bind; they were expected to stay in the "proper" province of affect, yet they were simultaneously damned for it because affect was an inferior mode which could not match the symbolic prestige of "serious" poetry.

With its publication in the women's albums and journals of the mid century, women's poetry had largely enjoyed a female readership, and the albums formed an important place for women writers to get their work published.⁵ The albums, large-scale forms of production for female consumers, were inevitably denigrated through their association with mass culture; Margaret Reynolds refers to a key scene in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871) in which Lydgate ridicules the sentimentality of the album, though Eliot had acknowledged that the album played a key role in the establishment and professionalisation of the work of women poets.⁶ Eliot had enjoyed early exposure through this medium, and according to Reynolds, it offered a means to a supportive network amongst women writers in which female editors were instrumental. The journals continue to be a significant arena at the end of the century, both publishing women's poetry for the first time, and reprinting selections as we shall see in the case of Constance Naden, bringing the poems to a wider audience, but more specifically relocating them in relation to a less restricted field and bringing them into the context of feminist debate.

Mrs Elizabeth Amelia Sharp, wife of William Sharp (the poet, "Fiona Macleod") was editor of a collection *Women's Voices: An Anthology of the Most Characteristic Poems by English, Scotch, and Irish women (WV)*. She argued in her preface:

I have been fortunately placed for an acquaintance with much fugitive poetry, and can assert with emphasis that there is a greater wealth of really fine poetic writing at present appearing in more or less obscure quarters that has ever appeared at any other period of our literary history. It is perhaps beside the mark – and I may be accused of bias and prejudice – but I am glad to be able to express at least one opinion when I say, that among the minor poets of this generation women have written more that is worthy to endure than men have done.⁷

Her discussion of women poets already starts out tentatively, disclaiming her own authority despite her editorial role and authorship of several volumes on music and poetry,⁸ and in her ranking of these “new” women writers as “minor” poets. She was, however, bringing them together in what could be described as a feminist project. Indeed, Sharp’s choices share much in common with those of recent anthologies assembled by feminist scholars, which aim to reintroduce women poets who, unlike those “poetesses” of early and mid century, had vanished from view. These projects, although a hundred years apart, share an interest in evaluating who the Victorian woman poet was at the end of the nineteenth century. I choose to discuss poems which Sharp has selected, in order to reflect upon the shared identity which their anthologisation here suggests. Amongst Sharp’s selections the subject of evolution forms a significant thematic in verse by Emily Pfeiffer, Alice Meynell, Mathilde Blind and A. Mary F. Robinson, my readings will consider how science was incorporated in women’s poetry. Some of the poems I quote from are given in a short appendix.

Alice Meynell’s (1847-1922) poem ‘The Modern Poet: A Song of Derivations’ (1893)⁹ is spoken in the first person. In this context of a collection of women’s poetry it

thus addresses questions of cultural legitimacy in speaking as a woman poet to a presumed female audience, in which anxieties about creative process and identity are generated through conceits of mothering, the past and nature. Meynell has been described as a modernist writer whose interest in psychological states and subjectivity align her with modern psychology rather than a late-Victorian tradition of women's writing,¹⁰ issues which I treat in chapter 7. However, her treatment of genius here draws strongly on Romantic poetics of creative genius, memory and Nature, which could be successfully negotiated by women writers, as I demonstrate in chapter 8.

This poem can be read as a meditation on an evolutionary self; layering identity as both creator and muse, the poet asks about the origin and nature of memory in relation to self:

I come from nothing: but from where
 Come the undying thoughts I bear?
 Down through long links of death and birth
 From the past poets of the earth.
 My immortality is there (*WV* 292).

In the first two lines the speaker simultaneously belittles her own intellectual substance and origin whilst claiming to bear immortal thoughts through an inheritance from earlier poets. Her answer suggests she has an affinity with a literary lineage both through a vital, living language and a hereditary, flesh-and-blood one. Thus Meynell evokes two types of inheritance, that of biology, and of cultural transmission. The nature of the modern self has an ephemerality which is contrasted with the weighty heritage of an ancient ancestry:

“I am like the blossom of an hour; / But long, long vanished sun and shower / Awoke my breath in the young world’s air”(WV 292).

She identifies her role as actively involved in creating her poetic identity; by “tracking” the past back the poet is engaged on the investigative task of the explorer. This metaphor sees her in the pursuit of mapping the historical and intellectual terrain of her literary predecessors. Yet later on the poet’s self becomes disembodied and filled with song, a conduit for inspiration from earlier writers: “[o]r I am like a stream, that flows / Full of the cold springs that arose / In morning lands, in distant hills; / And sown the plan my channel fills”(WV 292). Her work fulfils a preordained role, conferring both grandeur on her art yet disclaiming individual originality.

An evolutionary past is hinted at in the prehistoricism invoked by the “young world’s air”, the glacial epochs of “melting of forgotten snows”. The “relics of the far unknown; / And, mixed with memories not my own” fits the biological frame which she has constructed, evoking a Lamarckian notion of hereditary memory in which the subject learns through the accumulated inheritance of progenitors’ previous experiences. Natural images of prehistoric landscape and diurnal temporality: “morning lands in distant hills” are evoked to reconcile the notion of genius with the poet: these metaphors have the effect of exteriorising genius, locating it outside the efforts of the individual, displacing it onto Nature, and thereby naturalising it.

The relation is a mystical or spiritual communion: “blessed with relics”. In the language of Romanticism the artist is a seer or prophet, hence she claims her “genius” to be divinely inspired in her possession by ghostly voices. She takes on the mantle of poetic genius, but it is not an act: rather it is something that *happens* to her which even denies the act of original speech: “songs that wake in me / Woke long ago and far apart”.

The burden of “genius” weighs the female poet with responsibility. To describe her heart, implying the female self or soul, as diminutive – a feminine trope – appears to evoke the belief that female bodies did not have the physiological or biological capacity for the role of seer, as earlier centuries had argued.

Thus the association of memory with “genius” has a newly inflected weight of legitimacy through hereditarian discourses. Despite using metaphors from the organic world, as were used by the early Romantics, including the grandeur of a sublime landscape, the artistry of the genius self is not produced through those images of giving birth to ideas, of the effort, labour and pain of a creative production, thus preserving a sense of propriety in Victorian women’s art. Such a paradigm of genius could also clearly differentiate the poet from the degenerate; the instability which was an outcome of the efforts and energy of the genius could rapidly deteriorate into the pathological outpourings of mania, as the degenerationist, and cautious eugenicist held. The thread of humility which runs through the poem appears to renounce her acts of original creativity, even as she lays claim to sing such new refrains in an adaptation of masculinist tropes in which artistic acts of creation are divine. In the career of a successful woman poet who as well as writing poetry, co-wrote, edited and published a journal, and published essays elsewhere, the emphasis on the spiritual and divine embodies a denial of effort or work; it is a displacement of creative and artistic *labour*. This disavowal of the market-place removes the artist beyond the competitive realms of the commercial, thus excusing the woman writer from the charge of being unwomanly in her determined and committed pursuit of artistic excellence.

Helen Groth, in her discussion of mid-Victorian women poets’ use of scientific narratives, observes that the rise of the novel and the increasing influence of science

meant that Victorian poetry underwent a crisis of cultural authority. Women poets of the mid-nineteenth century Groth suggests, represented the “humanising function of poetry”¹¹ which, in the cultural context of proliferating scientific explanations of natural and social structures, imbued it with a political resonance. This politicised “humanising” for Groth makes the demand “that poetry be contemporary and provide a more humane vision of the world”.¹² For the late nineteenth-century poets whose work I discuss, science was explicitly a modern idiom in which they chose to explore notions of progress and the New Woman identities which were bound up with them; humour was one register in which science was given interplay with satirical sexual politics.

In 1887 the poet May Kendall (1861-1943) had confidently celebrated ‘Woman’s Future’¹³ in a marching rhythm, linking women’s progress with their intellectual pursuits, particularly their achievements in understanding and leading scientific innovation. Linking femininity, modernity and technology, the poem opens with a refutation of the pronouncements of patriarchal law in which female inferiority was naturalised. For a triumphant Kendall, the laws of evolutionary change were definitely on the side of women: “[t]he laws of the universe, these are our friends. / Our talents shall rise in a mighty crescendo, / We trust Evolution to make us amends!” (*NCWP* 763). Surpassing the feminine achievements (woolwork, patchwork) and bodily charms which fade with time, scientific knowledge will beautify women by empowering them: “the knowledge of Newton will beam from your faces, / The soul of a Spencer will shine in your eyes” (*NCWP* 764). Women’s inspiration by Spencerian philosophy would, however, prove more problematic than this verse might suggest, as Constance Naden’s career will illustrate later. In calling women to take a career, Kendall recommends an occupation in science or technology: “[i]nvent a new planet, a flying-machine” (*NCWP*

764) these will encourage mental or intellectual evolution, leading to the “time when our brains shall expand!” (NCWP 764). These exhortations also share in the socialist beliefs of Saint-Simon of science for self-improvement and the liberty of the working-classes, reflecting Kendall’s commitment to radical politics explored elsewhere in her verse. The speaker is eager to link the lived experience of modernity with the laws and pace of evolutionary change. Events in real historical time such as university education for women, an achievement for feminism in recent history, were made to exemplify the workings of evolution as a linear unfolding of progress in which women could, and should, envisage themselves as agents of history.

The passage of evolutionary time and the changes it wrought in the human and infrahuman world were imagined in the poems that follow, according to a model of evolution, not revolution, with varying degrees of harmony and discord. In ‘Evolution’ published in *Songs and Sonnets* (1880)¹⁴ Emily Jane Pfeiffer (1827-1890) reworks and almost personifies “evolution” as a Godhead present at a primordial, oceanic scene. Like the metaphors of Charles Darwin’s presentation of natural selection in *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in which “natural selection” is personified as an omniscient agent, Pfeiffer’s evolution is such a force working on, and characterising the natural world. The poet’s addresses to Evolution make it an omnipotent figure: “[t]hou mad’st the Universe thy park and grange” (VV 276). This is a characterisation which preserves the identity of the displaced Godhead to whose powers living beings are in subjection. But unlike the trope of the oft-quoted passage in which Darwin characterises natural selection as a beneficent agent – “daily and hourly scrutinising throughout the world, every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and

adding up all that is good; silently and insensibly working”¹⁵ – Pfeiffer’s evolution is impersonal rather than benevolent.

She characterises evolution as motivated by “hunger”, a notion of appetite and desire which governs every aspect of sentient life and forms of energy: “[h]unger that strivest in the restless arms / Of the sea-flower, that drivest rooted things / To break their moorings [...] Hunger, of whom the hungry-seeming waves / Were the first ministers”(WV 276). Rather than seeing the struggle to survive as a conflict between creatures, struggle is imagined as the response of animals to the impact of “evolution” on their lives and environment. Expressing the humanising impulse which Groth identifies, the poet dismisses popular metaphors of evolution which condone industrial society’s ethics: she suggests that greed, which had its expression in laissez-faire capitalism – naturalised by Herbert Spencer – is not a motor of evolution, nor is self-destructive lust for violence and conflict part of the natural order: “[n]o unthrift greed spurs thine unflagging zest / No lust self-slaying hounds thee to the strife”(WV 276).

Pfeiffer’s poem ‘To Nature’(WV 277) also published in *Songs and Sonnets* (1880)¹⁶ is more pessimistic and mourns the post-teleological world – a godless one which proceeds without direction or an ultimate purpose – into which a knowledge and understanding of evolution had coldly pitched so many of Darwin’s generation; one such contemporary was Thomas Hardy whom the poem’s bleakness appealed to, for he copied it into his literary notebook of that year.¹⁷ The central conceit of ‘To Nature’ is maternity, in which the construction of gentle Mother Nature, “nursing mother, clothing with her life/The seeds of Love divine”, must – albeit regretfully – be overturned. Nature is not “calm”, peaceful and benevolent, but essentially undirected and without purpose: a force which is “aimless”, “needless”, “(s)tumbling” and “mindless”; a Tennysonian

feeling of despair which was shared by later poets. Bitter regret is expressed at finding in the “wild work” of nature a disinterested rather than a compassionate basis to life. The apparent objectivity of the natural world produces a seeming contradiction: “[c]old motor of our fervid faith and song / Dead, but engendering life, love, pangs and fears”. In Pfeiffer’s vision, spirituality is stripped away and humanity suffers from an acute sensibility for love and its attendant anxieties, which is engendered by the cold agency of nature, a nature which is indifferent, and inhuman. Pfeiffer concludes with a bleak perspective on human agency in which amelioration of the suffering of man’s soul is deemed to be only a “seeming goal” which Nature “darkly blundered on”.

In her poem ‘Darwinism’¹⁸ Agnes Mary Frances Robinson (1857-1944) also addresses evolutionary narratives and their outcomes, tracing the stages of evolution from primordial origins to the present. In ‘Darwinism’ the movement of time is characterised by a dynamic of cycles, in which time moves circularly to return to the same point. If the notion of recurring circles refers to an immanent structure in historical events, that which turns the cycle here is, if not a revolutionary force, at least a motor of discontent.¹⁹

The attention to palaeontological detail in her language indicates a conscious rewriting of origins and a display of knowledge which demonstrates an intention to anchor her verse firmly in scientific discoveries: “first the unflowering Fern-forest / Shadowed the dim lagoons of old [...] the great fronds of green and gold”(NCWP 730). The scene is in a palaeontologically accurate Eden; it is tropical, and the green and gold foliage – thought to be the earliest colours of plants – are composed of the ferns which, before they furnished the romantic gardens and ferneries of the late Victorians in their “pteridomania” had dominated the Lower Carboniferous period before the flowering plants. The advent of the apple causes no Fall, “upon the unblossoming wood / There

breaks a dawn of apple-flower" (*NCWP* 730): female culpability is written out of this narrative of origins. The ape enjoys a domestic tranquillity: "happy in his airy house [he] plucked the apple and sucked the grape", and unlike contemporary anthropological accounts, the role of women in the progress of evolution is not specified.

Although not reflecting as violent an atmosphere as Pfeiffer's "divine unrest" (*WV* 276), Robinson's prehistoric world is also characterised by unease: "(a) vague, unconscious, long unrest" (*NCWP* 730); the source of evolutionary change is an "old, unchanged, remote distress" which eventually transforms the "unquiet ape" alike with an "unborn and aching thought" (*NCWP* 731) until he attains humanity. The nature of modern discontents, this "new travail of the soul", is not specified: "now the same unrest / Goads to the same invisible goal". But the change which would be mysterious, "undream'd, unguess'd", will be a "new gift" (*NCWP* 731) expresses the notion of dissatisfaction as a gift, an enabling and productive factor in evolution. Robinson's version of Darwinism departs from Pfeiffer's by seeing evolution not as a "cold motor", but a source of melioristic, even civilising, change.

The poetry of women at this time can be grouped with their male counterparts and the trends in their work. Grant Allen's verse offers points of comparison to that of the women poets discussed here, in particular May Kendall, in his presentation of evolution and metadiscourse on poetry. In this resemblance are possibilities for subversion. Allen's poetry has received very little critical attention in recent scholarship; Barbara Arnett Melchiori's *The Downward Path Which Leads to Fiction* deals with some of the verse in an appendix, focusing on the "fallen women" poems.²⁰ The title of Allen's collected verse *The Lower Slopes, Reminiscences of excursions round the base of Helicon, undertaken for the most part in early manhood* (1894) in which he situates his own verse

at the bottom of Helicon – the mountain upon which, in Greek mythology, the Muses lived – rather than claiming an intimacy with the Muses at the peaks, is a typically witty gesture of self-deprecation. In a second defensive gesture he gently undermines his verse as juvenilia; the volume was a collection of poems which had mostly been published before, as early as 1874. One contemporary Victorian reviewer found in the volume:

the instinctive felicity of expression in which if only he took more pains, not even Mr Stevenson would be his master; there is in his attitude to all science and all truth the humble awe of the novice energised by the enthusiasm of the zealot, and allied to this that propagandist fervour, that mania of exposition, that remorseless insistence on lucid, detailed and mathematically exhaustive explanation which sometimes exasperates us by its prosaic pedagogism.²¹

Allen was already established as a populariser of science and a propagandist novelist, and the critic brings this identity to bear on his reading of the poems, finding in Allen's self-ordained role as proselytiser for evolutionism an almost pathological fervour which, in poetry, marks him as an amateur, and zeal which is not commensurate with high art. As in the bifurcation of his other literary products discussed in chapter 2, Allen rated, and wished his critics to judge this volume by its lyric poetry especially those on "fallen women", above his humorous poems on evolution. The group of poems on prostitution were those which he felt to be the most important, and his biographer Clodd suggested they were "the motif of the volume",²² taking as they did a time-honoured theme upon which most of the major poets of the period had written. Like his Hill Top novels written

to express his own conscience, these poems too might be read as a personal expression of strongly held beliefs.²³

In his letter accompanying a copy of *The Lower Slopes* sent to Herbert Spencer,²⁴

Allen characterised the collection by its serious, “gloomy” colour:

[i]n sending them, I need hardly remind ‘you’ that lyrical poetry, being essentially the crystallised form of a fleeting emotional state, is necessarily somewhat one-sided.

Like that ‘instantaneous photograph’ of a London Street, it gives in factitious permanence the passing aspect of a changeful whole. The side I have shown here is the gloomy one: different emotional moment would show it in brighter colours.²⁵

In his theory of Associationism, largely derived from Spencer, Allen had showed aesthetic feelings as subjective states corresponding to physiological, or nervous, ones. Here he scientises his writing as an aesthetic outcome determined by biological processes. By presenting his lyrical poems as an impression, the record of a transitional subjective state, the creative production, process is effaced or downplayed, even mechanised (“instantaneous photograph”). Thus the political or polemical subject of many of these poems is diminished by the suggestion that they are the expression of a moment rather than a studied, laboured and intellectualised product. By implication, Allen makes the humorous evolutionary poems in their “brighter” tone, the “light” side of the collection.

He ensured that the humour and lightness of his evolutionary poems was tempered with references to the serious work of high-brow cultural producers. He dedicated his poems ‘The New Poetry’ and ‘Animalcular Theology’ to his friend the

writer and critic Richard Le Gallienne (1866-1947) a founder of the Rhymers' Club and part of an emergent generation of male aesthetic poets in the 1890s like Yeats, Kipling and Lionel Johnson. In 1894 – the year in which his wife died²⁶ – Le Gallienne stayed with the Allen family during the summer – probably following his bereavement.²⁷

Allen's dedications to Le Gallienne suggest a position-taking related to that which Bourdieu identifies as one of the fundamental oppositions structuring this subfield of restricted production: the struggle "between *artistic generations* [...] between cultural orthodoxy and heresy".²⁸ For Allen to align himself, however obliquely, with the newcomer is to bid for the symbolic capital which is at stake in this struggle; a dedication to his younger friend, and a familiar address to the aesthetic poet²⁹ signals some claim to commonality with the avant-garde and the symbolic capital which accrues to those who challenge the cultural orthodoxy. In turn, Le Gallienne in his memoir of Allen generously remarked that *The Lower Slopes* has "a more important place than has yet been allowed to it, or than he himself would have claimed for it".³⁰

Like Robinson's 'Darwinism', Allen's 'A Ballade of Evolution'³¹ charts the unfolding stages in the "progress" of evolution in each stanza, illustrating "natural selection" as we move from the "mud of the Cambrian main", the environment of our earliest ancestors where the "fittest will always survive, / While the weakest go to the wall", to "sexual selection": "So the handsomest managed to wive, / While the ugliest went to the wall"(LS 9). The peaceful vegetarian primate (who also features in Robinson's 'Darwinism'), "as an ape [...] was fain / The nuts of the forest to rive" develops into early Man, marked by violence and cannibalism: "[t]hus did cannibal men first arrive / One another to swallow and maul;/And the strongest continued to thrive"(LS 10) is plotted as an evolutionary outcome of the "survival of the fittest". In the last stanza

with Man in command of his “hive”, the presentation of modern civilisation in which the “wealthy in coaches can drive, / While the needier go to the wall”(LS 10), naturalises inequitable social conditions but at the same time disparages them as “uncivilised”. A crude biological reductionism is encoded in this metrical representation; by indicating a chronological progression which illustrates the laws of evolution with its repeated Spencerian refrain: “[f]or the fittest will always survive / While the weakest go to the wall”(LS 9) the poem’s glib conclusion follows from the “ballade” form whose chorus acts to restrict any critical development of its theme.

The nineteenth-century reviewer E. Purcell found Allen’s ‘Only an Insect’³² to be a “fine poem”, claiming rather spectacularly, “I am by no means alone in thinking that this singular poem so delicate yet so strong, so passionate yet so finely chiselled if only it were widely known would be enshrined among the rarest gems of English poetry”.³³ ‘Only an Insect’ is a meditation on suffering and pain after a moth flies into a candle on the poet’s writing desk. Allen’s tendency to proselytise combined with his tone of maudlin introspection mean that the poem’s five long stanzas suffer from a heavy-handed treatment. This poem conforms to a formula deployed to great popular effect in his many essays for the *Cornhill*, *Longman’s Magazine* and other periodicals in which Allen begins from a small incident or observation of a detail in nature, and in his commentary draws out wider scientific or philosophic significance, putting the microscopic in a macroscopic perspective. He makes an anthropomorphic claim that the beautiful “lustrous” moth which is “[d]azzled and stunned / By the scalding pain, / One moment it swooned. / Then rose again”, feels pain as it flies into the flame: “pangs that thrilled / Through that martyred frame”(LS 36). The poet then reflects on its painful end, characteristically musing “[w]hat themes abstruse/Might I meditate!”(LS 36). However, he can only

conclude that the combined efforts of Philosophy and Theology cannot explain the cause for the existence of pain.

Mary F. Robinson's 'Fireflies' (*WV* 329) collected in Sharp's anthology proves an exception to Alice Meynell's complaint that English poetry lacks any poems on fireflies.³⁴ Like Allen's 'Only an Insect' Robinson's poem on insects considers the interrelationship of humanity to a mysterious organic world in a way which complements the solemnity of her thought in 'Darwinism', but sentimental anthropomorphism is not permitted in Robinson's far more subtle address to the strange fireflies. Where Allen's uncertainties are expressed in a grandiose, over inflated language, Robinson's metre succeeds in being succinct and elegant, an effect of the predication of her verse on beliefs expressed in a religious language.³⁵

The visual image of the flight of the fireflies evokes the notion of fate in a world in which human will is suspended in the almost pantheistic mystery of an eternal cosmic order, yet it also draws on the imagery of evolutionary affinities. Their circling flight is described as weaving with "pale" fire the very "web of life", a popular metaphor for relationships in the language of evolution, yet one which also retrieves a mythical trope of the weaving of fate. Although the speaker and the fireflies are of a shared origin – "[b]orn of the earth, alive / With the same breath that I respire" – the fireflies "bereft / Of thought, or will or love" are contrasted with herself "[w]ho know, and think, and strive". Whilst the poem originates in a troubled desire to know, a measured beat conveys an assurance. Robinson is not troubled by the attempt to understand agency; the mystery she rediscovers in the terrestrial world is located in both an ancient cultural narrative and inflected by a Darwinian understanding of a deeper connection.

Much of Allen's poetry gives opportunity to explore his early religious doubts, as in 'In Magdalen Tower' set in the context of his Oxford undergraduate studies, in which he ponders on the nature of sentient life: "[w]hen primal force wrought on sea and granite / The wondrous miracle of living birth, / Did mightier Mind, in clouds of glory hidden / Breathe power through its limbs to speak and know[?]" (*LS* 3). He voiced his atheism in 'A Vindication' when he replied to Tennyson's 'In Memoriam', (cxx): "[a]h, happy you who know your birth / Has loftier origin than earth" (*LS* 59) and aimed to vindicate humble human ancestry by taking pride in a sort of self-made ape/man who has aspired to "raise his race some places higher" by living "a life not much amiss". Reassured that he is morally sound, he identifies himself as "an ape with spirit" who, paradoxically, must "manfully resign his dream / And take his rank in nature's scheme" (*LS* 60).

These doubts are satirised in the more confident, flippant humour of Allen's 'The First Idealist' in which a jelly-fish features as the misguided early philosopher who believes itself to be centre of the universe: "[i]n short like Hume, I very much doubt / If there's anything else at all without", until it is eaten by a passing shark. This theme was also gently satirised in the teasing 'Animalcular Theology' which asked "[w]hy fancy nature's cosmic plan / modelled on monad or on man?" (*LS* 42). It critiques humanity's anthropocentric claims expressed in religious faith, and the idea that "their petty souls rehearse / The drama of the universe" (*LS* 42). In contrast to Kendall or Pfeiffer, Allen's treatment of evolution is usually solipsistic and inward looking, focusing upon the individual's response to the impact of evolution theory, its effects on his own religious belief and philosophical basis of ontological knowledge rather than what evolution might do for disenfranchised groups. Even without having the cultural capital of other poets he

writes from a position of cultural power as an educated man which results in an individualist perspective.

May Kendall's exploration of scientific man has a sophisticated and nuanced, as well as lively, humour. In 'Education's Martyr' from her collection *Dreams to Sell* (1887) she discerns the loss of a broader cosmological perspective which certain applications of science effect, in the figure of an educated, pedantic naturalist. His aesthetic is determined by an epistemological view in which everything belongs to a separate branch of knowledge and is valued accordingly: "[t]he mighty cliffs we bade him scan / He banned them for Laurentian, / With sad, dejected mien." Her use of geological vocabulary – "Laurentian", "Azoic", "Pleistocene" – is knowingly learned, but unlike Robinson's use of scientific knowledge in 'Darwinism', is deployed to satirise the martyr's restricted vision: " '[t]han all this bleak Azoic rock,' / He said, 'I'd sooner have a block – / Ah me – of Pleistocene' (*VWP* 635). For the martyr, everything must be classified, he cannot find beauty in the familiar: "[p]rimroses by the river's brim / Dicotyledons were to him / And they were nothing more" (*VWP* 635), gaining scientific knowledge here, implicates a corresponding loss. The others in his company, who romanticise the "scenery" and the "matin songs of larks", in speaking of "[p]oets dead and gone / Of that Maeonian who shone, / O'er Hellas like a star" use a language which indicates a knowledge of classical civilisation of an equally sophisticated register, but they draw on their knowledge to enhance, not limit, their perspective. Kendall's use of the Greek words *κεν* and *γαρ*³⁶ simultaneously signals her knowledge of the language as an educated woman whilst targeting its dryness and irrelevance here, also a favourite complaint of Allen's in his objection to women's higher education, yet made for different effect. The poem's conclusion, "[a]h! happier he who does not know / The power that

makes the Planets go, / The slaves of Kepler's Laws; / Who finds not glands in joy or grief" (*VWP* 636) expresses an antagonism toward a reductionist scientific perspective, and endorses a romantic naturalism which encompasses aspects of our perception of the natural world that exceed the limits of scientific methods. As Kendall's presentation of science in 'Woman's Future' (1887) embraced a modernity in which an understanding of an evolutionary connectedness in the world liberated women, so she remains critical of a scientific knowledge which is dry and academic, not dynamic and integrated into life; it is over pedagogic issues which she expresses concerns.³⁷

In 'Lay of the Trilobite' (1887)³⁸ a man's encounter with a trilobite – unlike the existential questioning resulting from the "personalised loneliness"³⁹ of Henry Knight's confrontation with that "mean relic"⁴⁰ in Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) – is dealt with by Kendall in a comic vein which undercuts the confidence of the man's belief in evolutionary meliorism. In this witty exchange the civilised philosopher on a mountain walk who is looking for "[s]ufficient vague and mighty thought / To fill my mighty mind" (*NCWP* 760) reassures himself with the fossil evidence of extinction of the truth of the "survival of the fittest": "[h]ow wonderful it seemed and right, / The providential plan, / That he should be a Trilobite, / And I should be a Man!" (*NCWP* 761). But he is confronted by the "primitive" trilobite who questions his version of "progress". It mocks his society's zeal for war "[y]ou've cannon and you've dynamite / To give the nations rest" and although lowly, remarks on the hypocrisy of missionary imperialism: "[t]he native of an alien land / You call a man and brother / And greet with hymn-book in one hand / And pistol in the other!" (*NCWP* 731). The encounter leaves the walker a humbler man who with a childish wistfulness makes the three magic wishes: " 'I wish our brains were not so good, / I wish our skulls were thicker, / I wish that Evolution could / Have

stopped a little quicker' "(NCWP 762), a conclusion in which Kendall playfully strips him of his earlier chauvinism.

Kendall also treats these themes in 'The Lower Life'⁴¹ which using the same complex rhyme scheme as in 'Education's Martyr' still manages to convey the measure of spoken language. The poem considers the absurdities in supposing humanity to be the highest form of life: we are "[t]oo high, yet not quite high enough" (VWP 640) and the verses proceed to invert the terms in the hierarchy. The speaker finds that although our bigger brains make us the "higher" species, we are not as supremely adapted as those other creatures, making the colloquial complaint "[b]ut why not throw the swimming in / Why not the flying?" (VWP 639). The so-called "lower" species – the fishes and birds – are found to be fitted to their environment; they are even superior in enjoying greater mobility in their spheres than humans do. Like the reformed walker in 'Lay of the Trilobite' who longs for what he imagines to be the simplicity and liberty of life in the Silurian seas, the speaker makes an identification with the "lower" forms, the dreamy possibilities: "[o]r could I be a bird and fly / Through forests all unhaunted by / The shooting season" (VWP 640). This idealism also expressed sympathy with the very real interest in animal rights and anti-vivisection held amongst nineteenth-century feminists and radicals who were beginning to turn away from hunting as a "sport".⁴² Kendall deflates humanity's sense of importance by considering: "[o]ur aeon too will pass, and then / Are monads so much less than men?" (VWP 640)

In Kendall's poem 'The Philanthropist and the Jelly-fish' (1887) another comic dialogue between human and strange creature is treated with a further, feminist dimension displaying a sly humour which relishes the absurdity of a romantic attachment between the male philanthropist and the indifferent jelly-fish, drawing out the sexual

politics of the meeting. The exchange is satirically gendered, the male philanthropist is attracted to the feminine jelly-fish, “[h]er beauty , passive in despair [...] shone” making her “the fairest jelly-fish I e’er / Had set mine eyes upon” (*VWP* 636). His anthropomorphism, and gendered discourse, are ridiculed through the voice of a stoical female jelly-fish who is the “lower” form, a technique which delights in reversing power between the speakers which also characterises the ‘Lay of the Trilobite’. The simpler life form mocks the philanthropist’s misguided compassion and heroic action for the one specimen when the whole group are stranded: “[y]our culture’s incomplete / Though your intention’s kind; / The sand, the seaweed, and the heat / I really do not mind”(*VWP* 637). The verse builds toward a conclusion with a biological term which surreally heightens the sense of a world of nonsense when the jelly-fish declares: “*I haven’t a Sensorium, / And that is how it is*”(italics in original, *VWP* 637). All of these comic laments delight in the contradictions and absurdity of humanity’s belief in its position as the “highest” species who are nevertheless *subject to an Evolution* “still the same / With knights or pawns pursues the game/And shows no favour”(*VWP* 639). The preposterous in her humour topples anthropocentrism by consistently using the natural world to critique the socio-cultural belief in “progress” and the “March of Reason”(*VWP* 640).

This section has demonstrated how, after a century of recognition of women’s poetry, female poets in addressing themselves to evolutionary scientific discussions deployed these modern concerns and the cultural authority which it could confer upon their speech. Their strategies in tone, register, language and uses of humour, demonstrate a variety of successful means in making feminist protest against the high-culture discourses of science. Their diverse approaches in dealing with science widened the possibilities for women’s poetry and signalled a deliberate moving away from the

quintessentially feminine subjects of home and family and modes of sentiment and affect, for the poetess. Kendall's engagement with scientific, scholastic debates for example, placed her in a dynamic relation with male poets and genres, such as the comparison with Grant Allen's poetry has suggested.

In the following section the ways in which two women poets, Constance Naden and Amy Levy, were subjected to the very discourses against which they were writing as New Women. As we will see, Allen's objections to Levy, as situated in poetic and journalistic fields, form a dialogue on the female poets' place in the restricted field of poetry, and represent a specific view from a particular non-discursive position within it.

The poet and materialist philosopher, Constance C. W. Naden (1868-1889) combined science with poetry in her career, seeing all disciplines as associated through a synthetic philosophy. Marion Thain has presented Naden as a poet worthy of reconsideration in the light of new theories of feminist poetics and focuses on her treatment of the gendered poet/muse relationship.⁴³ James R. Moore's article is an excellent comprehensive study of Naden's life and work, but his emphasis on the autobiographical in his reading of her poems as compensating for the lack of profundity in certain poems tends to diminish the significance they have for her feminist politics and reinforces the way in which women's poetry has traditionally been read through the lens of their life stories.⁴⁴

Naden was born and brought up in Birmingham where she studied botany at the Birmingham and Midlands Institute and afterwards modern languages at Mason College of Science. Under the tutelage of the solipsistic, materialist philosophy of Dr. Robert Lewins, she published many articles on "hylo-idealism", a philosophy which was not merely atheistic but was also strongly anti-theistic. Derived from Kant's early thought in

Critique of Pure Reason it was based on the creative principle that each individual self-creates and determines its own universe and existence, and this was to be integral to her thinking. She published two collections of poetry *Songs and Sonnets of Springtime* (1881) and *A Modern Apostle; The Elixir of Life; The Story of Clarice; and other Poems* (1887) which contains humorous poems on 'Evolutional Erotics' and on the New Woman. In 1887 she set off for Europe with her friend Madeleine M. Daniel, and also travelled on to India for nine months. On her return she lived and worked in London, where she died eighteen months later from ovarian cysts.

In 1887 when Naden had published her second volume of poetry she was asked for a contribution by Oscar Wilde, then editor, to *Woman's World*,⁴⁵ which suggests that her public recognition was growing; her writing was also reviewed and republished in the feminist journals which served to bring her work to a different audience. Consideration of the way in which Naden's writing featured in feminist papers will show her to be a significant and unusual, polymathic figure for the women's movement. In a review of William Hughes' memoir of the poet, *Constance Naden, A Memoir* (1890), Naden's book, *Induction and Deduction* (1890) was earnestly recommended to readers of *Shafts*⁴⁶ and in the *Woman's Penny Paper* the socialist feminist Jane Hume Clapperton – author of *Scientific Meliorism and the Evolution of Happiness* (1885) – was instrumental in bringing Naden's work to the attention of women readers.

In a series that was accompanied by a photo-portrait of Naden, Naden's brand of Spencerian evolutionary thought in her volume of collected essays *Induction and Deduction* was introduced by a knowledgeable and critical writer to a wider female audience. In her study of Naden's evolutionary ethics, Clapperton notes how although "Mr Spencer had spoken of family ties as pre-eminently favourable to the cultivation of

sympathetic feeling”⁴⁷ that Naden had demonstrated the insufficiency of his account of the genesis of moral constraints in his *Data of Ethics* (1879). In an extract of Naden’s critique, Clapperton cites her feminist objection to the implied emphasis on the confinement of women to the domestic:

[a]t a later period of social development these ties frequently help to narrow and specialise the sympathies setting bounds beyond which they cannot easily pass. This is often injurious to deep natures causing them to pour into some narrow channel an intensity of emotion which might have fertilised broad regions of life.⁴⁸

It is an objection with which the paper’s readers would have been in agreement: middle-class women’s limitation to work within the home meant that their feelings were focused upon husband and children rather than the wider community, entailing their failure to fulfil their capacities for social, intellectual work and other greater public offices. The interest for the woman reader of Naden’s essays is appealed to through analysis which focuses on the feminist aspects of her philosophy.

Naden’s somewhat less rarefied poetry also found a place in the feminist periodical press. Her poem ‘Six years old’ (*Songs and Sonnets of Springtime*), a long, autobiographical poem about childhood, appeared in *Shafts*: “I make tales about flying and creeping / About branches, and berries, and flowers; / And at night, when I ought to be sleeping / I wake and lie thinking for hours”.⁴⁹ Printed under the heading ‘For the Young Folks’, this depiction of a precocious and sensitive girl was designated as part of family reading. Whilst clearly not a verse for children in its original context, the poem nevertheless offers a charming portrait of wilful and imaginative femininity which would

'The Lament of the Corkcell' from 'The Lady Doctor' group of poems takes the process of cells in the tree turning into cork for its subject. James R. Moore reads much of Naden's *Songs and Sonnets* as autobiographical, suggesting that in this poem the orphaned only child Constance:

alludes very cleverly to her presentiments by personifying a moribund cell, "once ... young and tender./Alive with chemic yearnings" but which now is "drifting from its mother/Naked and homeless in the cruel storm/ Having no aid of sister or of brother/nor any cellulose to keep it warm."⁵²

If the poem's anthropomorphism does have a personal dimension its ostensible informative content was well suited to the ethos of the paper in this context of publication. With its profusion of biological terms and narrative of chemical process: "when transparent and elastic/My membrane scarce retained its endoplast / When, homogeneous, semi-fluid, plastic,/My vital molecules rotated fast"(CPW 99), the poem does not take a recent scientific discovery for its subject,⁵³ but the distinction between cells and membranes inscribed is a socially significant one. The basis of cell division as a universal structural principle – discovered by Theodore Schwann in the 1830s – was important for Naden's philosophy because she maintains the concept of the individual "I" as a cell functioning independently. The knowledge of the animation and individuation of all living things sharing a common vital principle based on this organic affinity was available to Naden through her studies in botany, and is a theme that recurs throughout her writing.⁵⁴ Her light, comic treatment of organic processes, nevertheless conveys an

assurance in Darwinism which does not admit the doubt or disappointment underlying the impulse toward absurdity expressed in May Kendall's poetry.

Naden's poems in two groups, in particular 'Evolutional Erotics' and 'The Lady Doctor', like Kendall's 'Woman's Future' present an emancipated modern femininity firmly in the context of evolutionary science. Poems such as 'Scientific Wooing' and 'The Lady Doctor' variously evaluate the role of professional, scientific knowledge in both men and women's lives, often presenting this as a difficult choice for women between marriage or career, love or learning. Rather than just advising women to make a moral choice between "busy toil" and "fond swain" (*CPW* 85) and dedicate oneself to the public good or to family life, this split has its most complex expression in consideration of the difference education makes to a woman's identity and outlook, and how it determines her selection in love.

The 'New Orthodoxy' is one lively poem among these which best illustrates the significance of this debate. In a letter written by a discerning New Woman, a sweet girl graduate Amy at Girton College Cambridge discovers her lover Fred at Oxford now fails to embrace the scientific creed which they had both formerly held; this causes her to hesitate about their marriage, comically underlining the modern factors in female sexual selection; "advanced" women want men who share their deeply held political and intellectual convictions. An assertive Amy expresses her dismay to Fred that, "having read in vain / Huxley, Tyndall, Clifford, Bain,/All the scientific train - - / You're a hardened sceptic!" (*CPW* 313). Gender roles are questioned, Naden assures us the female scholar however "advanced" is not any less feminine: "the simplest village maid / Needs not be much afraid / Of her sister, sage and staid, / Bachelor of Science" (*CPW* 312). But the masculine integrity of the conservative male is questioned: "-- to please a maiden

aunt -- / You've been heard to say you can't / Pin your faith to Darwin"(CPW 314).

Taking control of their courtship, Amy promises to continue to be Fred's betrothed only on the condition that his faith in Darwinist science remains strong. 'The New Orthodoxy' highlights not only how education is integral to a modern female self identity, but in particular, presents the assumption that evolutionary science can be a liberatory discourse to a spirited New Woman of autonomy, integrity and agency.

Many of Naden's poems in these groups participate in the new attempt by women poets to redefine middle-class feminine experience, confronting the ambitions for education and a professional career and the choices and dilemmas which this created for such women. Also a commentary on the new feminine experience, Allen's poem the 'New Poetry' presented the choices between knowledge and love for women as antagonistic. The choice of a classical register, rather than a comic one like many of his other poems, its dedication to Le Gallienne with its nod toward the romantic Hellenism of the aesthetes⁵⁵ soberly invests the debate with the seriousness of high-culture. It features a sensual Aphrodite, already represented in his 'The Return of Aphrodite' an Arnoldian paean to the banished spirit of hedonism, pitted against Pallas Athena goddess of wisdom and hunting, in warring over all the hearts and loves of men and acting as muses who inspire the male poet, a mythic division which is invested with contemporary anxieties.

Aphrodite is constructed through a romanticism which promotes a particular "womanly", reproductive, erotic femininity; her votaries enjoy "smooth paths of wedded rest"(LS 30) which lead off into the "voluptuous tints [of] the gorgeous [sunset]"(LS 30). By contrast, the emotionally cold, rational realms of the philosophical and the scientific are given over to Pallas: "[h]ers are such hands as range the infinite train / Of insect, beast, and bird, of fern and flower"(LS 31). This learning liberates her from patriarchal

control, an implication reinforced when, in a voice deceptively gentle as her own doves, Aphrodite calls Pallas “my foe, a virgin never wed”, her chastity here is associated with the celibacy of asceticism. In contrast to Aphrodite’s soft warmth the goddess of learning is personified as austere and frigid: “[h]er throat is cold, and like strong winds she moves”(LS 30): all of Pallas’ characteristics locate her within a model of classicism corresponding to the contemporary discursive field. Aphrodite claims to have wooed away from Pallas’ shrine the poets whose “[f]ingers that know the dainty skill to twine / Blossoms of thought in garlands for her shrine – Sweet poets, who were once her devotees, / I have enticed away, and *they* are mine”(LS 30). Passionate love is what inspires the poet, not the dry reason of science. The distinction between romanticism and classicism which clusters around a dichotomy between knowledge, logic and reason, and passion and love as a sex instinct is of course one which is central to Allen’s eugenic arguments.⁵⁶ The contrast and competition between the two female figures intimate the kind of femininity which is held of value within a eugenic romanticism; the unmarried female scholar figure who has her incarnation in the “unwomanly” sterile New Woman contrasts unfavourably with the woman of “amorous lures”(LS 30).

This antithetical relationship between the scholarly, or in modern parlance the “Girton Girl”, and the maternal woman was endlessly rehearsed by cultural commentators, and in no more powerful formulation than in the belief that geniuses could not be found among the female sex because the matter of their bodies could not bear the strain of subsisting with such “‘demonic’ influences”.⁵⁷ As Havelock Ellis was to reaffirm on the question of genius in women in his autobiography in 1934, “women – though a few attain to the second rank of genius and many possess a streak of it – are entrusted with the preservation of the species, and that is an altogether concrete matter.

Here are the central interests of women. We come down to the biological foundation of our world".⁵⁸ The following will explore the relationship between pathology, gender and genius as it is mapped onto two prominent female, and feminist, poets.

During the earlier part of the century, women poets had been disciplined by medical theories which held that female physiology was unable to withstand the rigours of intellectual creativity which poetic work demanded. The treatment of the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning for the "vapours" for example, kept her confined as an invalid to bed, a diagnosis which she did not meet without resistance; she criticised her controlling physicians in their conclusions on the impact of the work of female "rhymers" on their health, as metaphysicians.⁵⁹ In the late nineteenth century these medical arguments took on a new vitality with the latest findings in both biology and physics.

The limited-energy model of conservation theory which, by drawing on the First Law in physics held that the body had finite amounts of energy for its expenditure, became influential throughout the late nineteenth century in its implications for what in physiology were the newly integrated healthy bodies and minds.⁶⁰ For British psychologist Henry Maudsley and others of the profession, girls needed to allow their vital energies during adolescence generally and during menstruation in particular, to be directed toward their reproductive functions; this could not happen if schooling and study became paramount. In his article 'Sex in Mind and Education' (1874) Maudsley claimed that there was "sex in mind as distinctly as there is sex in body",⁶¹ and on the basis of essential differences between men and women's brains he argued that women should be denied educational opportunity. Whilst Maudsley acknowledged that there are "extraordinary women" of "great mental power" they were anomalous, and only geniuses despite their mental culture. His work, as recent critics have pointed out was

“not science at all but a scientific ideology of social control”.⁶² Unsurprisingly, on the basis of his findings in physiology, Maudsley recommended training for women in their natural life’s work: maternity and child care. In *Man and Woman: A Study of Human Secondary Sexual Characters* (1894) Havelock Ellis in his commentary on women’s genius found that the fields in which women had succeeded, such as fiction, did not demonstrate the creativity which greater art, such as poetry, demanded. Fiction “makes far less serious demands” than poetry, “[i]t is only when (as in the work of Flaubert) the novel almost becomes a poem, demanding great architectonic power, severe devotion to style, and complete self-restraint, that women have not come into competition with men”.⁶³ The art of poetry “is very rare in women”, and where it is written by them, like the female physiology which lacks the robust, muscular vigour and virility of the male body, women’s poetry, Ellis suggested “has a tendency to be rather thin or rather diffuse and formless”.⁶⁴

In the backlash to the New Woman’s entry into higher education and the professions, the law of the conservation of energy was pressed into service in medico-scientific discourses to punish the female who – like Naden’s Girton Girl, Amy – overreached herself in a project for self-development which might delay or even exclude marriage altogether, with the threat of sterility, illness and even death. The eugenicist physician Dr. Arabella Kenealy in her anti-New Woman essay ‘The Female Athlete’ in the *Nineteenth Century* presented the modern female body with the popular, technological metaphor of the engine, as similarly subject to the mastery of the industrial age:

[t]he healthy human body, like a machine, has its fixed standard of force-production, varying according to the individual [...] any expenditure of force beyond that manufactured by the economy as its daily output is followed by fatigue [...] incapacitation, prostration, or actual illness.⁶⁵

The limited force expenditure theory was deployed here as an explicit argument against the woman's movement; for Kenealy any change in women's lifestyle, ostensibly cycling and "athleticism" in this article, but in fact in any departure from dedication to domestic, household and family duties, would severely compromise "proper", nurturant, femininity:

[t]he woman whose forces are depleted by the feverish expenditure which has become the key-note of our modern life, whether this be done in social dissipation, in intellectual exhaustion, or in muscular waste (or in all three), is deficient in a quality for which I can find no better term than atmosphere – a species of aura, magnetic charm, nerve-essence [...] it is a womanly potency imparting rest and infinite refreshment.⁶⁶

Debates over female genius and its relation to the body were generated by Constance Naden's death, on Christmas Eve, 1889 – remarked upon by several notables, including W. E. Gladstone, Herbert Spencer and Dr. Samuel Smiles. In January 1890 the *British Medical Journal* carried a report from the Birmingham and Midland Counties Branch of the British Medical Association of an operation on dermoid cysts of the ovaries on December 12th 1889.⁶⁷ It states that Mr. Lawson Tait exhibited the tumours removed from a patient whom we can infer was Constance Naden, as Moore⁶⁸ has

recorded that Tait, who had a highly successful record in ovariectomy, was Naden's surgeon in London.⁶⁹

Posthumous remembrances of the poet Naden in response to the publication of her collected works were inflected with the tropes of this psycho-physiological economy. One reader,⁷⁰ remembered Naden as quintessentially feminine: "a soft, fair girl who, perhaps, would not have attracted much attention from a society of butterflies" yet burdened with an intellect disproportionate to an infantile, female body, she was "born to great things, but her brain was too big for her frail frame, and she died in Mayfair from illness contracted in India (as one might say) little more than a child, leaving the world a flower the less".⁷¹ Other commentators drew on common constructs of "genius" as a quintessentially masculine quality, even when it was displayed by a woman, describing her prose as: "combining the woman's delicate intuition with the more masculine power of firm logic".⁷² But these constructions would have their most forceful expression in Herbert Spencer's commentary.

If the law of conservation was integral to Spencer's synthetic philosophy, the relation of individuation and fertility, developed in an essay of 1852, was a cornerstone. In this early work, Spencer found that fertility would decrease with the progress of civilisation and the application of mental powers it required, the self-sufficiency and industry of the Englishman entailed a "further enlargement of the nervous centres, and a further decline of fertility".⁷³ But by the end of the century the predicted decrease in fertility was coloured problematically by a number of socio-economic and cultural factors and was no longer seen as a positive effect of civilisation. In his article 'Psychology of the Sexes' (1873) Spencer argues for fundamental psychical differences between men and women, determined by adaptation to maternal and paternal duties which result: "from a somewhat

earlier arrest of individual evolution in women than in men, necessitated by the reservation of vital power to meet the cost of reproduction".⁷⁴ The arrest of evolution in women is manifested mentally by a "perceptible falling short in those two faculties, intellectual and emotional, which are the latest products of human evolution – the power of abstract reasoning and that most abstract of the emotions, the sentiment of justice".⁷⁵ Although he admitted that it was unlikely "those who wish to change fundamentally the political *status* of women will be influenced by the considerations above set forth on the comparative psychology of the sexes", a rather circular argument only reinforced the maxim that the formation of society is the outcome of underlying psychological patterns of essential difference in the sexes: "there may be acceptance of the general conclusion, that psychological truths underlie sociological truths",⁷⁶ those psychological "truths" being his own findings. He conceded however, that the differences between men and women's mental abilities could be ameliorated: "it is to be anticipated that the higher culture of women, carried on within such limits as shall not unduly tax the *physique* (and here, by higher culture, I do not mean mere language-learning and an extension of the detestable cramming-system at present in use), will in other ways reduce the contrast".⁷⁷

Herbert Spencer wrote to Robert Lewins on the occasion of Naden's death. His letter gives a reading of her sick body as the evidence of the economy of bodily energies, the wages of grappling after the "demonic influences" of genius. Singling her out as an almost unique Victorian female intellect, Spencer wrote of Naden that "[v]ery generally receptivity and originality are not associated but in her they appear to have been equally great. I can tell you of no woman save George Eliot in whom there has been this union of high philosophical capacity with extensive acquisition".⁷⁸ But he added:

[w]hile I say this, however, I cannot let pass the occasion for remarking that in her case, as in other cases, the mental powers so highly developed in a women are in some measure abnormal and involve a physiological cost which feminine organisation will not bear without injury more or less profound.⁷⁹

If giving birth to ideas would jeopardise a woman's maternal generative powers, rendering her sterile, the implication is that in Naden's case a legitimate form of female authorship might have been the creation of a child. Jane Hume Clapperton quoted Spencer as saying, "[u]nquestionably her subtle intelligence would have done much in furtherance of rational thought, and her death has entailed a serious loss".⁸⁰ It was precisely this intellectual power of Naden's which would have been such a forceful dynamic "in furtherance" of the woman's movement had she lived longer, and it was her feminism which caused Spencer to temper his praise with misogynist feeling.

Spencer's misogyny was not met without resistance at a site where Naden's identity as a New Woman had been produced. Defamation of her name was fiercely contested, this began with a letter to the editor of the *Woman's Penny Paper* in July of 1890 from the companion whom Naden had travelled to India with, Madeleine M. Daniell. Daniell's communication negotiates carefully the cultural capital which Herbert Spencer's praise of Naden conferred upon her posthumous reputation but she seeks to publicly defend Naden against the wholly subjective conclusion which Spencer made between her death and her intelligence. Daniell writes as a friend of Miss Naden and carefully notes her and other friends' gratitude for Spencer's favourable remarks made to Lewins in his valuable letter".⁸¹ But despite her genuflections she emphatically states: "Miss Naden's lamented death was not caused by her exceptional mental development.

Her health up to eighteen months before her death was exceptionally good, and the disease which terminated fatally was one common alike to the dull and to the gifted".⁸² She suggests that Naden's intellectual energy, achievement and patterns of working were in fact due to the "strength and healthiness of her brain",⁸³ and by stressing the healthy pattern of working Naden undertook: "[s]he generally wrote for some hours every day, mostly on philosophy, and rose from work as cool and fresh as when she sat down",⁸⁴ Daniell disclaims any pathological associations about the female genius as a fevered, unbalanced artist. Although she allows that such intelligence may be "abnormal", she counters that this is not a "necessary consequence" in either sex. As well as finding the prominent women's rights campaigners "Augusta Ramsay (Mrs Montague Butler), Miss Fawcett and Miss Alford"⁸⁵ in good health, Daniell capitalises on the comparison which Spencer made of Naden with George Eliot. She cites Eliot's age at death – sixty-one – as a testimony to the lack of ill effect from intellectualism, and attributes the headaches from which Eliot suffered – no worse than "a vast number of women who scarcely ever open a book"⁸⁶ – to the disparity between social expectations of gender and Eliot's own marked, intellectual achievement and pleasure taken therein, and lastly to the poor understanding of health and sanitation of the period. Daniell's choice to publish such a letter in this feminist paper, I think, registers the importance of this arena for struggle over women writers' lives and their posthumous reputations in relation to debates over the defining of the possibilities and limits of female intellectuality.

In a letter entitled 'For Herbert Spencer To Answer' in the *Penny Paper* a reader who has less personal investment than Daniell in defending Naden's identity remarks sarcastically upon Spencer's ungenerous comments about Naden which had been published in the paper:

[i]t is very hard on Mr Herbert Spencer and his theories, that Nature should have made the strange mistake of endowing women with brains, especially in such abnormal quantities as she has seen fit to confer on Miss Naden, and numbers of others who the world is beginning to hear. I should like to ask Mr Spencer what ought women to do, to whom Nature has been so unkind as to bestow them mental gifts rare in both sexes? And, when it is accompanied by superabundant physical health, is it still a freak of Nature's and to be deplored? ⁸⁷

This debate was continued with a letter from a woman signing herself "one who has studied hard from eight years on" who refuted the connection made between study and female disease, and suggested that there was a reverse scenario:

[r]especting the fear expressed by Mr Spencer and others that brainwork will injure women's health, how is it that men have never thought of noticing the terrible effect of want of brainwork upon the woman of previous generations? I am sure every woman over 30, if she spent any portion of youth in the country can recall numberless instances of women sinking at about 40 years of age into wretched invalidism, solely because they were denied the exercise of the faculties God had given them. ⁸⁸

The diffusion of women's poetry was not confined to the restricted publication of volumes read by those that could afford the typically expensively bound volumes; their work could be read, the impact of their beliefs and status as poets be debated as part of feminist discourses in the feminist press. Naden herself was of course painfully aware of

the position of the female poet and philosopher; my conclusion with one of Naden's poems will demonstrate her own interrogatory resistance on the relationship between death, knowledge and science, art and nature.

The sonnet 'Poet and Botanist' is a metacommentary on the role of the scientist-poet. Naden compares the role of each figure in relation to nature, questioning the legitimacy of methods of obtaining and presenting knowledge.⁸⁹ The sonnet suggests that our intervention, knowledge and representation of nature is always subjective or incomplete; the bees are the only "innocent thieves" of its treasury. The supposedly objective botanist who seeks "the record of the bud" (*CPW* 333) cannot tell the whole "truth" of nature by opening the bud before it has blossomed. In a metaphor of male surgery on a female body: "with his cruel knife and microscope" to "[r]eveal the embryo life, too early freed", the botanist's violent intervention aborts the plant from reaching its full cycle of growth suggesting that there is no unmediated access to nature; both findings are incomplete representations. The poet's treatment of nature can also be cruel: representing the flower to serve his own aims he violates it: "crushing the tender leaves to work a spell" he "bids it tell / His thoughts, and render up its deepest hue / To tint his verse". Naden's suggestion that the language of nature is not transparent also highlights the way in which the female body and nature are treated as analogous in the culture. Both considered sites of alterity, in the process of becoming objects of male knowledge they are to be known through a subjection to a violence which controls as it "kills". Naden knew that masquerading within the systems of the biologist were patriarchal values veiled in scientific garb.

The death of another female poet in the same year became the focus for a debate on the detrimental influence of education for women and more generally as a symptom of

the stresses of modernity. This chapter will conclude with examination of cultural representations of the death of the poet Amy Levy (1861-1889) by suicide. Levy was the first Jewish student to attend Newnham College Cambridge; she wrote fiction, poetry and essays and belonged to female literary and political activist circles. She died from asphyxia from breathing in gas emitted by burning charcoal in 1889.

The link between female creativity and suicide featured in Victorian culture throughout the century bound poetic femininity with suffering.⁹⁰ The prevailing myth in the nineteenth century of Sappho's literary fame and subsequent suicide was reembodyed in the beautiful, successful, but suicidal poetess of Madame De Staël's *Corinne, or: Italy* (1807), a French text which enjoyed success in Britain during the first half of the century. In turn this novel informed the representation of the successful poet, and literary society figure Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-38) and, Linda Shires suggests, increased her marketability.⁹¹ Landon's strange, early death, thought to be suicide with prussic acid, contributed to a mythology of female poet suicides of which Levy's death would also become part.

Levy's "racial" and gender identity – her Jewishness, and her femininity as an educated female poet – offered grounds for an explanation of the degeneracy of her suicide. In an essay on Amy Levy's feminism and Semitic discourse, Emma Francis examines how a specific set of discourses on Jewish mental "degeneracy" abounded with explanations of the factors of urban habitation and racial interbreeding offered by anthropologists and psychiatric theorists in the 1880s.⁹² Levy's own treatment of the subject of suicide in her poetry can be compared to fin-de-siècle explanations of the causes of suicide. In order to understand better the specific discourse of the relationship between women's education and death which was spun around the event of the poet's

suicide, I briefly look at the connections which were being made between suicide and modernity in the pessimistic forecasts of society's degeneration.

John Stokes' examination of literary and other cultural representations of suicide in the 1890s finds that the perceived increase in rates of suicide was understood and represented by many in the press as a response to the stresses of modernity, an observation in which Hardy's literary representation of suicide in *Jude the Obscure* also participates. Stokes cites the prevalence of the belief that the suicide rate was proportionate to the increase in the rising levels of education; a belief based on the notion of a philosophically informed pessimism rather than a direct correlation between learning and physical or mental damage. A leading study, Henry Morselli's *Suicide: An Essay on Comparative Moral Statistics* (1879) translated into English in 1881, in a generalised conclusion suggested "[s]uicide is an effect of the struggle for existence and of human selection, which works according to the laws of evolution among civilised people",⁹³ bringing his researches in line with modern Darwinian narratives. Like other social scientific studies of the time, it shares the methods which catalogue the suicidal person as an index to degeneration and frame their action as evidence of their unfittedness to live.

In an article in the *Cambridge Review* Ellen Darwin, a friend of Amy Levy's, clearly distinguished Levy's passionate and tragic poetry from the morbid pessimism of the decadents: "I do not think that anyone could confuse her poetry with the conventional poetry of cultivated weariness and despair. Her tone indeed is always sad [...] but it is not sad because she feels that the world is empty".⁹⁴ Edmund Kerchever Chambers' sympathetic *Westminster Review* article 'Poetry and Pessimism'⁹⁵ reads in Levy's poetry and life a pessimism characteristic of the Post-Darwinian age and indicative of the problems of social evolution at this period: "fifty years of individualism, of free thought,

and unrestricted competition, have bitten their mark deep into our civilisation. The suffering which inevitably accompanies the struggle for existence is no less, but greater, for organisms upon a high level of self-consciousness.”⁹⁶ The trajectory of Levy’s melancholy, which culminates in her suicide, is read as an evolutionary outcome from the modern socio-economic environment of laissez-faire capitalism, so destructive to the too highly evolved sensibilities of humanity, and in particular to its intellectuals.

Clementina Black the feminist campaigner, journalist and friend of Levy wrote to the *Athenaeum* to counter reports made against Levy in respect of her suicide, particularly that she had been shunned in the Jewish community for her novel *Reuben Sachs*. Black explains that:

[i]t is not true that she ever left her father’s house other than on visits to friends or holiday journeys [...] She did suffer for several years from slight deafness and from fits of extreme depression, the result not of unhappy circumstances or of unkind treatment, but, as those believe who knew her best, her lack of physical robustness and the exhaustion produced by strenuous brain work.⁹⁷

Her defence of Levy as properly feminine in never leaving the patriarchal home colours her with a womanliness, signalling her intellectual identity as one fostered outside the damaging, public arena. Beckman suggests that Black, although herself a suffragist and trade union activist could only have portrayed Levy as bound to the domestic sphere as “damage control” in order to preserve Levy’s literary reputation and mitigate her family’s suffering.⁹⁸ It is also apparent that despite her feminism, Black also draws on the myth of the young woman having a bodily frailty unequal to the labours required of intellectual

and artistic achievement which had surrounded the death of Constance Naden. At a time when knowledge and understanding of clinical depression was limited, Black chooses to depict Levy's literary identity in this culturally recognisable formula, however dangerously appropriatable by misogynists to cite in their battle against women's higher education.

The effects of strenuous "brain work" on the feminine mind and physique, which Spencer had so eloquently theorised, was a favourite hobbyhorse of Grant Allen's; for him, Levy's suicide made her a fit target for abuse of the higher education of women and he demeaned her status as a poet in the light of her death. Linda Hunt Beckman suggests that Allen befriended Levy when she had become celebrated; Beckman cites a diary entry for 1889 in which Levy spent the summer in a cottage in Dorking where she also "spent some time with the novelist Grant Allen and his family at their cottage nearby". Levy's diary records that after dinner the Allens and their guests "[d]iscussed the Woman Question GA thinks marriage not permanent'."⁹⁹

Despite any friendly acquaintance with Levy, his essay 'The Girl of the Future' of the following year was hardly flattering: he explicitly linked Levy's death to the effects of higher education and the woman's movement which inaugurated it; Levy had attended Newnham College from 1879 until 1881 completing her second year without taking her final exams. In this essay, facetious metaphors link Levy's suicide to her University education: "[a] few hundred pallid little Amy Levys sacrificed on the way are as nothing before the face of our fashionable Juggernaut. Newnham has slain its thousands, and Girton its tens of thousands; the dark places of the earth are full of cruelty."¹⁰⁰ The Cambridge colleges are crushing the life and vitality out of girls by cramming them with facts and Greek, which according to Allen, are inappropriate subjects for women whose

primary “instruction” should be priming them for motherhood and childbearing and making them subject to male control of their bodies; they should be filled with babies, not facts.

One letter writer to the *Women's Herald* in 1890 responds to the article, objecting to the way in which Allen undermines the woman's movement by using science – which should be its ally – to criticise it, and to the way in which the movement is misrepresented by the association of his views with it:

[t]he growth of Positive Science and the Elevation of Women are modern movements which have made great progress. Recently, however these movements have been represented as antagonistic to each other. Grant Allen in the name of Science, attacks the woman movement in two articles – ‘Plain Words on the Woman Question’ and ‘The Girl of the Future’ [...] The ghost of poor Amy Levy is invoked with great effect till one recalls such names as Keats or ‘poor Chatterton’, for neither of whom Girton can be held responsible. One suspects that the scientific imagination, rather than ‘scientific research’ inspires the lament that Girton had killed her thousands but Newnham her tens of thousands!¹⁰¹

Allen made an even more personal attack on Levy in his poem ‘For Amy Levy's Urn’¹⁰² in which he summons the dead woman to life through an elegy only to lay opprobrium upon her ambitions and achievements. “This bitter age” is one in which women are claiming access to education, the jobmarket and the franchise. For Allen the competition cannot be on equal terms, he describes the pitting of “maids with men”, making women diminutive and childlike. The metaphors employed here collapse

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distinctions between intellectual and physical weakness and paucity, putting into play the energy conservation discourses of the Spencerian physiological divisions of labour. “Her woman’s heart”(LS 21) takes on the biological dimensions of a gendered physiology, rather than emotional or spiritual ones if her identity is constructed in accordance with Spencer’s model. “Fainting” and “weary”(LS 21) she is imagined as bodily frail, paying a physical toll for mental effort; intellectual energy expenditure is fatal on women’s weaker constitutions.

Levy’s poetry breaks with the expressive tradition which Isobel Armstrong identifies in Victorian women’s poetry with its basis that poets should express feelings and emotions rather than repress them, toward a characteristic release, and overflow, of feeling.¹⁰³ To achieve such release in poetry was considered, Armstrong argues, healthy, but hidden feeling, resisting expression could have pathological consequences. Thus the metaphors of expressive aesthetic are given “both a negative or pathological and a positive or ‘healthy’ signification, a hysterical and a wholesome aspect, often implicitly gendered respectively as ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’”.¹⁰⁴ Allen’s rebuttal is built upon a poetic orthodoxy of earlier models of femininity and creativity which suggested that Levy ought to have kept her breath for the affective female poetry of sentiment and emotion and not have attempted the philosophical. A failure to make poetic expression within the affective aesthetic, in which the trope of the breath is integral to the “airs” or songs of the poet, could be figured as the last “frail breath” of a pathologised femininity.

Poetry is imagined as an inhospitable terrain for a woman in this elegy, not one where women will achieve intellectual enlightenment: “worlds broke sunless”. The mountain motif echoes the Mount Helicon of the book’s title, implying an identification with Levy as a kindred minor poet skirting the lower slopes of poetic inspiration; yet the

mountain also traditionally epitomises the sublime, and of course in the Burkean categories of aesthetics the sublime is gendered as male. Such imagery suggests that Levy is unable to approach the supreme sublime in her artistic production and its heights of cultural and symbolic capital. The embrace with death is a compassionate image but also suggestive of acquiescence and passivity rather than an heroic or noble image of resistance. In this poem he is sure enough of his position-taking as a custodian of poetic form in attacking Levy in her own form or language to defend his art and specific interests of securing poetry for male writers and readers.

If, as Elizabeth Bronfen argues, the cultural representation of a dead woman, as a quintessential site of alterity, functions for psychic processes as a means of reassuring the (male) observer by projecting anxieties onto this Other, then in the case of Allen, visiting the dead female body through the elegy is a position-taking, a means of lending stability and weight to his own literary and cultural identity. her body would always already be reworked in to the topos of degeneration. Levy's body is "read" through other texts about degeneration and female weakness, that is, patriarchy still rewrites her body into the cultural order. She falls victim to existing cultural conventions and discourses and is replaced by the respective texts of other writers who "kill" the body-text again with their own narratives about femininity. Levy's suicide repeats and resists the discursive formations from which it is produced and against which it speaks.

Women poets approached scientific themes, narratives and debates in a variety of ways. In Pfeiffer and Robinson's poetry we see a dialogue between scientific and poetic languages, the secular and the religious, and the themes of progress and change which they address. Science increasingly becomes a signifier for modernity; for Kendall and Naden in particular, women's engagement with the implications of evolutionary science

was necessary for forging new feminine identities. Both Kendall and Naden's poems appropriate and subvert the discourses of the orthodox, male scientific establishment; they convey the impact of scientific progress in women's lives, exploring the tensions arising between men and women and in women's own choices as they moved into masculine spheres. This subversion was often assisted by a tactical approach to the subject with comic wit which could have a disarming effect, such as the irreverent humour of Kendall's trilobite and jelly-fish dialogues which approach "nonsense verse" yet keep a social satirical edge. If women's poetry was a field of cultural production only at a restricted level in terms of its publication, its reception and dissemination in the feminist press nonetheless broadened the scope of its effects, and it formed a significant site for the consolidation of poet as another New Woman identity.

By the examination of the discourses surrounding the deaths of Levy and Naden I show that the appropriation of cultural power by these poets had its antithesis in the ways in which the male scientific establishment sought to undermine New Women poets for their feminism, just as they claimed an active role in the discussion and dissemination of scientific theories and their implications. Knowledge, its object and acquisition, and in particular scientific knowledge in Western culture, has, George Levine notes, long been equated with death in a cultural configuration in which death is the wages of knowledge.¹⁰⁵ But the discursive formations of this relationship produced by theorists of modern science had a peculiarly gendered aspect to their moral stances over the legitimacy of how much it is right for women to know; linking pathology as the outcome to education, their critics saw women's participation in this high-culture form directly damaging both their maternal functions and mental health. The discourse devours the body/text and transforms its protest by incorporating it into its own. Yet their protests

were not rendered ineffective simply because they were turned against them, through the supposedly incontrovertible evidence of their bodies; these poems continued to “speak” after the death of the writer, finding a base of support in their circulation and debate.

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (1983; Oxford: Polity Press, 1995): 51.

² Ibid: 52.

³ Isobel Armstrong argues that “by the time of Aurora Leigh, 1856, factory and slave poems had ceased to do the work of politics and did the work of the heart instead”. ‘Msrepresentation’: Codes of Affect and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Poetry’, *Women’s Poetry: Late Romantic to Late Victorian*. Eds. Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999): 7.

⁴ For example, see Lynda M. Ely’s discussion of the career of A. Mary F. Robinson, in ‘“Not a song to sell”: Re-Presenting A. Mary F. Robinson’, *Victorian Poetry* (2000): 94-108. Ely contextualised the conditions of literary production for contemporary poet Mary Robinson, implicating her in “the dilemma of many other women writers of the Victorian period: her poetry is caught up in and relegated to the “chords of emotion” mentioned by Ladislav, trapped in the precincts of “feeling” or sentimentalism, and thus never makes the transformation to “knowledge” key to the production of serious (read male-authored) poetry”: 99.

⁵ See Margaret Reynolds, *Victorian Women Poets An Anthology*. Eds. Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995).

⁶ Ibid: xxvi.

⁷ Elizabeth A. Sharp (ed.) *Women’s Voices. An Anthology of the Most Characteristic Poems By English, Scotch, and Irish Women* (London: Walter Scott, 1887): viii.

⁸ E. A. Sharp translated from Italian and wrote about art, music and poetry. She also edited *Women Poets of the Victorian Era* (London: Walter Scott, 1890).

⁹ E. A. Sharp (ed.) *Women’s Voices* (1887): 292.

¹⁰ See Maria Frawley’s essay, ‘Modernism and Maternity: Alice Meynell and the Politics of Motherhood’, *Unmanning Modernism: Gendered Re-readings*. Eds. Elizabeth Jane Harrison and Shirley Peterson (Knoxville: University of Tennessee 1997): 31-43.

¹¹ Helen Groth, ‘Victorian Women Poets and Scientific Narratives’, *Gender and Genre: Essays on Women’s Poetry, Late Romantics to Late Victorians, 1830-1900*. Eds. Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (London: Macmillan, 1999): 328.

¹² Ibid: 328.

¹³ Isobel Armstrong and Joseph Bristow with Cath Sharrock (eds.) *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 763-4.

¹⁴ E. A. Sharp *Women’s Voices* (1887): 276.

¹⁵ Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by the Means of Natural Selection. Or, the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859; London: Penguin, 1985): 133.

¹⁶ E. A. Sharp, *Women’s Voices* (1887): 276.

¹⁷ Thomas Hardy had pasted into his literary notebook, Pfeiffer’s poem with slight variations, ‘To Nature II’ *Songs and Sonnets* (London, 1880) *The Literary Notebooks of Thomas Hardy Vol. 2*. Ed. Lennart A. Björk (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985): 102.

¹⁸ Isobel Armstrong and Joseph Bristow with Cath Sharrock (eds.) *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets* (1998): 730.

¹⁹ For discussion of contrasting paradigms of historic time see Stephen Jay Gould, *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (London: Harvard University Press, 1987).

²⁰ Barbara Arnett Melchiori, *Grant Allen: The Downward Path Which Leads to Fiction* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 2000).

²¹ E. Purcell, 'The Lower Slopes by Grant Allen', *Academy* vol. xlv (1894): 263.

²² Edward Clodd, *Grant Allen: A Memoir* (London: Grant Richards, 1900):151.

²³ It was a pose which betrays the other positions Allen took upon the work, such as in this letter to W.T. Stead the journalist, editor and social purity campaigner: "My dear Stead, – I am sending you my little volume of verses. There are three pieces in it I very much wish you to read. Those three pieces are called 'In the Night Watches', 'Passiflora Sanguinea,' and 'Mylitta.' If you read those three, I don't care about the rest of them. There are two men in England really in earnest about the horrible slavery of prostitution. You are one, and I am the other. Don't condemn without reading". Letter to W.T. Stead (12 Feb.1894) Edward Clodd, *Grant Allen: A Memoir* (London: Grant Richards 1900): 151.

²⁴ In the collection there is a paean to the scientist, 'To Herbert Spencer'. This poem had been first published in a scientific, rather than a literary context, in the *Popular Science Monthly* (Sept. 1875).

²⁵ Grant Allen, letter to Herbert Spencer quoted in Edward Clodd, *Grant Allen* (1900): 65.

²⁶ Valentine Cunningham states that in 1891 "Le Gallienne married Mildred Lee, a Liverpool waitress, who died in 1894 leaving Le Gallienne to look after their daughter". Valentine Cunningham (ed.) *The Victorians: An Anthology of Poetry & Poetics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000): 1042.

²⁷ Allen wrote to Clodd from Hindhead, "Richard Le Gallienne is with us, and we are doing our best for him. I think he will stay several days longer, as he dreads to return to his lonely cottage." (7 June 1894). Letter 13, Edward Clodd archives, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

²⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993): 53.

²⁹ 'Animalicular Theology' opens with the familiar address: "My dear Le Gallienne". Grant Allen, *The Lower Slopes*: 41.

³⁰ Richard Le Gallienne, 'Grant Allen', *Fortnightly Review* 9: 395 (1 Nov 1899):1005-1025.

³¹ 'A Ballade of Evolution' was first published in the scientific context of Allen's *The Evolutionist at Large* (1881) then collected in *The Lower Slopes: Reminiscences of excursions round the base of Helicon, undertaken for the most part in early manhood* (London: Elkin Matthews and John Lane at Bodley Head 1894). In the hyperbolic praise of reviewer E. Purcell: "No more ingenious or fantastic ballade has been written in English than that on 'Evolution' ". 'Review of "The Lower Slopes" by Grant Allen', *Academy* vol. 45 (1894): 263.

³² 'Only an Insect' was first published in Allen's native *Canadian Monthly* 6 (1874): 521.

³³ E. Purcell, *Academy* (1894): 263.

³⁴ "(T)he poets have somewhat slighted them. No one, for example, who had ever really marked their intricate free flight, the beauty of movement, the length, the multiplicity, the universal prescence, and the difference of direction of all these little lights, would have thought of tangling them 'in a silver braid' to make an image of Pleiades". Alice Meynell, *Alice Meynell: Poetry and Prose*. Eds. F. P et al. (London: Jonathon Cape, 1947): 249.

³⁵ For discussion of the expression of a mixture of religious and new scientific ideas in Robinson's poem, 'The Invisible', see Gillian Beer, 'Authentic Tidings of Invisible Things: Vision and the Invisible in Later Nineteenth Century', *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight*. Eds. Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (New York: Routledge, 1996): 85-98.

³⁶ Isobel Armstrong and Joseph Bristow give $\kappa\epsilon\nu$ as a modal participle with verbs which has several functions, and $\gamma\alpha\rho$ as "for".

³⁷ Kendall's gentle attack on the martyr further turns the criticisms of writers like Grant Allen, who criticised higher education for women and bemoaned the souring, and desexualisation, of the "sweet girl graduate" with dry facts, back on themselves.

³⁸ Isobel Armstrong and Joseph Bristow with Cath Sharrock, *NCWP* (1998).

³⁹ Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873; London: Penguin, 1998): 212.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*: 212.

⁴¹ Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds (eds.) *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995): 639.

⁴² For example the feminist physician, mystic and writer for *Shafts*, Mary Bonus Kingsford who was, Barbara T. Gates records, at "one time drawn to hunt alongside her young husband, she turned her back on meat eating and all bloody pursuits, refusing even to wear animal hides". Barbara T. Gates, *Kindred Nature Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Natural World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998):148.

⁴³ Marion Thain, 'Love's Mirror: Constance Naden and Reflections on a Feminist Poetics', *English Literature in Transition* 41:1 (1998): 25-41.

⁴⁴ James R. Moore, 'The Erotics of Evolution: Constance Naden and Hylo-Idealism', *One Culture Essays in Science and Literature*. Ed. George Levine (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987): 225-257.

⁴⁵ See Josephine M. Guy, 'Self-plagiarism, creativity and craftsmanship in Oscar Wilde', *English Literature in Transition* 41:1 (1998): 6-23.

⁴⁶ 'Reviews', *Shafts* (March 1893).

⁴⁷ Jane Hume Clapperton, *WPP* (2 Aug. 1890).

⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

⁴⁹ Constance Naden, *The Complete Poetical Works of Constance Naden* (London: Bickers and Son, 1894): 105. This poem also appeared in *Shafts* (Jan. 1896).

⁵⁰ *WH* (31 Jan. 1891): 50.

⁵¹ *WH* (2 May 1891): 56.

⁵² James R. Moore, 'The Erotics of Evolution', *One Culture Essays in Science and Literature*. Ed. George Levine (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1987): 236.

⁵³ Laura Otis in her work on the cultural signification of the membrane as a metaphor in literature of the nineteenth century records how while cellular structure in plants had already been established since the 1660s, when Robert Hooke has observed "cells" in cork that such cells existing in animal tissues was not demonstrated until the 1830s when Theodore Schwann's microscopic researches proposed that they were linked in a universal structural principle. Laura Otis, *Membranes: Metaphors of Invasion in Nineteenth-Century Literature, Science and Politics* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1999): 13.

⁵⁴ Otis states Schwann wrote that "[a]lthough every cell interacts with others and are subjected to the conditions provided by the organism" he believed that "we must ascribe to all cells an independent vitality". Otis remarks, "these descriptions suggest a tendency to think of individual cells as individual people, and historically, the vision of the body as an association of cells coincides with the vision of society as an association of autonomous individuals", highlighting a notion of the body politic belonging to the earlier part of the century. Laura Otis, *Membranes* (1999): 14.

⁵⁵ 'The Return of Aphrodite' celebrated the return of the Greek goddess of love to the world, as an emblematisation of an enlightenment from asceticism, a central metaphor for the revival of the Hellenic spirit as a return to the bodily life and to, heterosexual, eroticism.

⁵⁶ However, Allen was not confident in the efficacy of poetry as a cultural medium for promoting eugenic sensibility. In his essay 'Aesthetic Evolution in Man', *Mind* no.20 (Oct. 1880) : 463. Grant Allen claimed that poetry, as an aesthetic object whose aim was to stimulate a love of beauty, did not necessarily succeed in civilising or promoting human, and humane, progress.

- ⁵⁷ Henry H. Ellis, *My Confessional: Questions of Our Day* (London: John Lane, 1934): 172.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid: 172.
- ⁵⁹ See Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetic* (London: Women's Press, 1989).
- ⁶⁰ See Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991): 104-129.
- ⁶¹ Henry Maudsley, 'Sex in Mind and in Education', *Fortnightly Review* (June, 1874).
- ⁶² Cynthia E. Russett, *Sexual Science* (1991): 121.
- ⁶³ H. Havelock Ellis, *Man and Woman* (1894): 371, quoted by Flavia Alaya in 'Victorian Science and the "Genius" of Woman', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34 (1977): 261-280 (274).
- ⁶⁴ Ibid: 274.
- ⁶⁵ Arabella Kenealy, 'Woman as Athlete', *Nineteenth Century* (April 1899): 637.
- ⁶⁶ Arabella Kenealy, 'Woman as Athlete', *Nineteenth Century* (July 1899): 927.
- ⁶⁷ The report stated that, "[t]here were two suppurating dermoid tumours, one of which had made a connection with the rectum. They contained the usual fatty material, a quantity of hair, some pieces of skin, and bony elements from which grew milk teeth, many of which were lying loose in the cavity of the tumour. [...] the operation had been delayed almost beyond hope of recovery. It was as difficult as anything of the kind could be, but Mr Tait was glad to say the patient was making an admirable recovery." *British Medical Journal* vol.1 (11 Jan 1890).
- ⁶⁸ See James R. Moore, 'The Erotics of Evolution', *One Culture* (1987).
- ⁶⁹ *The Lancet* vol.1 (1890) also carries a report of the growing scientific interest in ovarian cysts, noting that they contain teeth and are found in children as well as adult females.
- ⁷⁰ Lady Burton, wife of Sir Richard Burton, the "explorer".
- ⁷¹ Lady Burton, *The Complete Poetical Works of Constance Naden* (1894): 8.
- ⁷² C. Lloyd Morgan Dean of University College Bristol, *The Complete Poetical Works of Constance Naden* (1894): 8.
- ⁷³ Herbert Spencer, 'A Theory of Population Deduced from the General Law of Animal Fertility', *Westminster Review* 57: 263 (1852): 468-501 (499).
- ⁷⁴ Herbert Spencer 'Psychology of the Sexes', *Popular Science Monthly* (1873): 30-38 (32)
- ⁷⁵ Ibid: 32.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid: 38.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid: 36.
- ⁷⁸ Spencer argued elsewhere that comparisons made between the minds of men and women must distinguish between receptive faculty and originative faculty. "The two are scarcely commensurable; and the receptivity, may, and frequently does, exist in high degree where there is but a low degree of originality or entire absence of it." Herbert Spencer, 'Psychology of the Sexes', *Popular Science Monthly* (1873-4): 31.
- ⁷⁹ Cited by Phillip E. Smith and Susan Harris, 'Brief Articles and Notes: Constance Naden: Late Victorian feminist poet and philosopher', *Victorian Poetry* vol.15 (1977): 367-70.
- ⁸⁰ Jane Hume Clapperton, *WPP* (2 Aug. 1890).
- ⁸¹ *WPP* (5 July 1890): 440.
- ⁸² Ibid: 440.
- ⁸³ Ibid.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid.
- ⁸⁶ *WPP* (5 July 1890): 440.
- ⁸⁷ *WPP* (26 July 1890): 475.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid: 475.

⁸⁹ Women were better represented as practitioners in botany than other sciences during the nineteenth century. It was deemed more suitable for women than other biological disciplines, such as medicine, because it did not involve the visceral contact with the human body; plant-life did not offer the threat of forbidden sexual knowledge entailed in human anatomical studies.

⁹⁰ Angela Leighton argues for contradictions inherent in this cultural ideal; the suicide ultimately denied the self and was structured as a response to male criticism/rejection, but was also, she suggests, a narrative of triumphant self expression and a dialogue between women.

⁹¹ Linda Shires, 'Victorian Women's Poetry', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 27: 2 (1999): 601-609 (608).

⁹² See Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain (eds.) *Women's Poetry, Late Romantic to Late Victorian: Gender and Genre 1830-1900* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999): 183-204.

⁹³ Henry Morselli, *Suicide: An Essay on Comparative Moral Statistics* (1881): 354. John Stokes, *In the Nineties* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989).

⁹⁴ Ellen Darwin, *Cambridge Review* (23 Jan. 1890): 158.

⁹⁵ Edmund Kerchever Chambers, 'Poetry and Pessimism', *Westminster Review* vol. 138 (1892): 366-376.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*: 367.

⁹⁷ Clementina Black, *Athenaeum* no. 3232 (5 Oct 1889): 457.

⁹⁸ Linda Hunt Beckman, *Amy Levy: Her Life and Letters* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000).

⁹⁹ Linda Hunt Beckman, *Amy Levy*: 177.

¹⁰⁰ Grant Allen, 'The Girl of the Future', *Universal Review* 25 (7 May 1890): 56.

¹⁰¹ *WH* (Aug. 1890).

¹⁰² Cremation was possibly an unusual choice for a Jewish burial at this time, as a report of Levy's death in the *New York Times* would suggest: "[a]t her own request she was cremated in Woking, being the second of her religion thus treated at this great crematory. A small oak chest containing her ashes was then buried in a Jewish cemetery." *New York Times* (22 Sept. 1889): 1.

¹⁰³ See Isobel Armstrong, 'Women's Poetry – An Expressive Tradition?', *Victorian Women Poets: A Critical Reader*. Ed. Angela Leighton (Oxford: Blackwell 1996): 245-276.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*: 266.

¹⁰⁵ See George Levine, 'Objectivity and Death', *Victorian Literature and Culture* vol. 20 (1992): 273-91.

Chapter 5

Eugenics, racial maternity and infanticide: imperial femininities in the novels of “Iota” and Victoria Cross(e).

Empire played an integral role in the discursive formation of New Woman identities in fiction. In chapter 1, I discussed the notion of “eugenic maternalism” in New Woman discourses with reference to late nineteenth-century feminist papers, and in chapter 2 in the popular fiction of Grant Allen. This chapter will analyse the way in which constructions of sexual maternity were produced in relation to a eugenics of empire, through an examination of novels by “Victoria Cross(e)” (Vivian Cory) and “Iota”(Katherine Mannington Caffyn), two under-researched women writers who lived in, and wrote about the British colonies of India and Australia. I will consider the ways in which medico-scientific discourse on female sexuality, and in particular, eugenic concerns over “race” purity and the strength of the British Empire, inform representations of women’s imperial identity in New Woman writing. Iota’s identity as a New Woman writer is in question; her depiction of the new colonial girl whose sexually selective powers are thwarted by the British marriage market correspond to a strand of “eugenic feminism”. My treatment of Cross’s novel *Anna Lombard* (1901) will focus on the subject of infanticide and its contemporary literary and cultural representation, exploring its relation to eugenics.

Recent scholarship has begun to confront the role of Victorian women and Empire, and the close links which feminism had in the imperial projects of civilising, missionary and philanthropic work. Vron Ware has demonstrated that:

although feminism provided women with potential understanding both of their common experience and their differences across class and race, as well as a new language of sisterhood, this international solidarity did not guarantee that their motives were necessarily progressive or radical, particularly as the Empire expanded and the numbers of British subjects grew.¹

Sally Ledger, drawing on Vron Ware's history of Victorian white women in India, also suggests the role of feminism's complicity in the Victorian cultural discourse of civilisation: "[f]eminism itself could be seen as part of the 'civilising' process, working in tandem with English civil law, education and Christianity".² Feminist theorisation of the interrelationship between private and public spheres in the nineteenth century informed activism based on the connections between the domestic and colonial. The campaigns of Josephine Butler in India to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts, and those for deregulation of the Indian prostitutes serving the British military, for example, were closely linked with social purity campaigns in Britain, and raised a number of concerns about the sexuality of the colonising men. In this chapter, I aim to investigate some of the ideological ambiguities which arise from what Nancy L. Paxton using a term from Antoinette Burton, terms "imperial feminism": that is, the feminism of British feminists and professional women of the latter half of the nineteenth-century who came to India in order to serve the Empire, but in so doing produced such contradictory effects.³

Imperialism featured strongly in evolutionary discourses as an outcome of "natural" law. In the eugenic evolutionism of Karl Pearson and others such as Alfred Russel Wallace,⁴ the "struggle to survive" upon which progress was predicated in natural selection was envisaged as operating at an inter-group level rather than at the level of competition between

individuals. For Pearson this form of struggle represented a higher level of civilisation making the dynamics of imperialism both “natural” law and “civilised”. Pearson’s eugenics, as Carolyn Burdett has demonstrated,⁵ deployed a socialist rhetoric of subordination of the individual to the greater good of the nation, which resubmitted women to their traditional role of passivity and powerlessness by claiming that (the middle-class) woman best served her nation as mother to the empire. By assuming responsibility for producing a “fitter” imperial race women would be fitting themselves to their “proper” civic role.⁶

The scientising of motherhood was treated enthusiastically by Frances Swiney, as I have illustrated in chapter 2 in discussion of her correspondence on eugenic maternity in the journal *Womanhood*. In *The Awakening of Women or Women’s Past in Evolution* (1899), Swiney indicted miscegenation as a social purity feminist, seeing it as the result of men’s base nature and lack of regard for purity:

[m]en have never had that instinctive pride of race, of intuitive self-respect, that, through the exercise of self-restraint, should keep their offspring free from tainted blood. The half-caste, be he the result of union between English and Negroid, Spanish and Indian, Boer and Hottentot, or Dutch and Malay, owes his existence to the unrestrained impulse of a father of a higher race than the mother, and literally born in sin, inherits the vices of both parents, with the virtues of neither.⁷

In their superior position in the vanguard of evolutionary progress, white women were also, for Swiney, guardians of the purity of the race, policing the borders of purity/contamination. As Robert Young notes, commentators have suggested that there is a profound connection between sexuality and racism; citing Ronald Hyam, he claims that “[s]ex is at the very heart

of racism”.⁸ In the imperial cultural context, for some feminists, including Swiney, sexual purity included racial purity:

it is to the influence of the white woman in the future that we must look for the enforcement of that high and pure morality which will restrain the conquering white man from becoming the progenitor of racial crossing with a lower and degraded type, dangerous to social and ethical advancement, in the lands that come under his sway.⁹

Like her male contemporaries, Swiney presented race theory as scientific, appealing to women to understand their subjectivity as mothers through the science of eugenics: “[i]t is on this important subject of preserving and transmitting untainted the purity and nobility of racial characteristics that woman, as mother, must bring her newly-acquired knowledge to bear.”¹⁰

A “womanly woman” writer whose novels linked maternal instinct with race motherhood in relation to Empire was “Iota”; “Iota” was the penname of Irish-born Kathleen Mannington Caffyn, née Hunt (1855-1926). *Trained as a nurse at St Thomas Hospital in London*, in 1879 she married a surgeon, also a best-selling novelist, and emigrated a year later to Australia with him and their baby, returning to live in London some years later.¹¹ Although she has been identified as a New Woman writer both to her contemporaries (one critic identified her heroines as those of the “woman novel” and the “physiologico-pornographic school”)¹² and in recent scholarship,¹³ her status as a *feminist* New Woman writer is doubtful. Iota’s novels ultimately reinforce traditional norms of feminine aspiration – marriage and motherhood as vehicles to reverse degenerationist trends of godlessness and emasculation. She does share the hopes of New Women such as Sarah Grand; Caffyn’s views on motherhood are “new” in the eugenicist values she brings through a colonial perspective

which expresses anxiety about the need for girls to be primed in sexual selection to procure the fittest of British men. Although many feminists shared her views on the primacy of motherhood for women then, Caffyn's belief was of maternity as a role exclusive of any other, and in her authorial voice she roundly condemned educated women and those with careers.

A Yellow Aster (1894)¹⁴ is a narrative of heredity and pronatalism; in its representation of a dysfunctional family and subsequent failure of the marriage of the protagonist Gwen Waring, it reproduces the dichotomy of reason and emotion which was a staple of earlier Victorian values. In common with other New Woman feminist texts, the novel contains an indictment of the ignorance in which girls are kept of the responsibilities and duties of sexual relations in marriage – yet it is essentially an anti-New Woman novel which defines femininity as maternity. Whilst this definition is an identifiable strand in the fiction of other New Women novelists like Olive Schreiner and George Egerton, Iota exclusively centres on the value of motherhood and criticises the independent thinking “bluestocking”. In *The Yellow Aster* the heroine's eccentric parents are too involved in pondering mathematical problems and scientific research to care for and nurture their offspring. They are atheists who aim to maintain their children in a strategic Godlessness from which Gwen grows up with a lack of empathy, love or maternal feeling. Gwen subsequently contracts her marriage as an “experiment” with a man she does not love and suffers the humiliation of submitting to marital “duties” and the resulting pregnancy. Only when her mother has a breakthrough of maternal conscience toward her – a hysteria evocative of a second childhood – and the two generations are reconciled, does Gwen experience motherly feelings of love toward her own baby, and her husband. Caffyn, who styled herself “not a literary woman, nothing of a

bluestocking”,¹⁵ presented intellectualism and femininity as mutually exclusive: the existence of the former in woman could only compromise the success of her maternity.

In 1894 in an interview in *Shafts* ‘“A Yellow Aster”: The Author at Home’ it is revealed to readers that “[t]he personality behind “Iota” is no longer a mystery , and ‘A Yellow Aster’ can no more be claimed as the much-looked-for-story by Olive Schreiner”; the interviewer added “[i]t was not in the Karoo that I found Mrs. Mannington Caffyn, but in the prosaic district of West Kensington.”¹⁶ Olive Schreiner’s novel *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) set in the Karoo of the South African bush had been published some eleven years earlier and her next novel was long-awaited. Shurmer Sibthorp and readers of *Shafts* clearly had mistaken *A Yellow Aster* for Schreiner’s prose, which seems an unlikely mistake to make. Hutchinson, the publishers of *A Yellow Aster*, may well have enjoyed the confusion arising from the hidden identity of the author in a market where readers clamoured not only for more of the prose and politics from the author of this early New Woman work, but for the popular genre of colonial fiction generally. Although motherhood is significant structurally and thematically in Schreiner’s novel, the heroine Lyndall rails against the one-dimensionality of women’s lives for whom marriage is their sole career, and thus she refuses wedlock to her lover, the father of her baby. By contrast, Iota condemns the loveless marriage on ethical, religious grounds, but fails to point to the material constraints upon women which necessitate it. Once she had actually read *A Yellow Aster*, a nineteenth-century reader may not have so easily mistaken the feminist politics of Caffyn’s for Schreiner’s.

Indeed, when questioned on the comparison made by reviewers between Schreiner’s novel and her own – despite praise for Schreiner’s book – Caffyn pointed out that “[Schreiner’s] ideas about marriage are very advanced and modern, and I agree with them only to a certain extent [...] I am not an advanced woman. I do not believe in ‘woman’s

rights'. A woman has her rights in her own hands without trying to advance them obliquely."¹⁷ In *Gwen*, Caffyn said she was portraying an "unnatural" woman; the result of conflict between the generations of mother and daughter: "[i]f we get so exceedingly intellectual there is a great danger of neglectful absorption. There is undoubtedly a want of sympathy between mothers and daughters. The 'Revolt of the Daughters' shows that. 'Gwen' of course, was the outcome of unnatural conditions";¹⁸ the author's use of the *Gwen* character formed a backlash to feminism in showing the ill effects of an educated mother upon the next generation. Given the context of an interview for feminist readers of this paper, Caffyn carefully tempered her and her husband's more vehement warnings against female intellectualism:

[s]ee what an excellent mother Mrs Fawcett is, for instance [...]. If a clever mother is a good politician and really understands things, she will be a tremendous help to her children. But I don't care for women to deal with public matters practically. I prefer that they should have only a theoretical knowledge.¹⁹

Mannington Caffyn who had lived in Australia, departed from the "prosaic" details of the metropole in her next novel and strategically deployed the colony and the passage of emigration in order to explore race motherhood and the confines of marriage which impede it. After *A Yellow Aster*, *A Comedy in Spasms* (1895)²⁰ followed, appropriately sited in Hutchinson's "Zeitgeist library" series. It is a novel which expresses the fin-de-siècle spirit of concern for national regeneration, constructing the colonial girl from Australia as a source for a modern, healthy femininity. Following her father's bankruptcy and death, Elizabeth Marrable, a colonial Australian, emigrates to England with her family and falls in love on the

ship with a man who is already engaged.²¹ In England, reduced financial circumstances of her family force her into marriage with a man she respects but does not love, and so she finishes childless and unhappy, and breaks off contact with her “lover” who then leaves for Tibet.

A Comedy in Spasms (CS) was reviewed in the *Signal* as ‘The Story of Elizabeth’ in the column ‘A Book of the Hour’ by Annie E. Holdsworth, herself a novelist.²² Holdsworth reviewed it favourably but took exception to the title which labelled it among the “perverse” modern novels:

[e]verything I suppose, is legitimate to an author, but in the prescence of such a name I wonder it will not soon be necessary to form a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Titles. Apart from the questionable pathological value of the phrase, “A Comedy in Spasms” is absolutely worthless as an index to the motif of this story.²³

She recognised the “motif of this story”, noting that “Elizabeth is little more than a splendid animal”.²⁴ Elizabeth Marrable (or marriageable) represents the “New Girl” who will regenerate England with her healthier body, freer, enterprising “Prospector” manners and maternal instincts generated by the hot sun and clean air of the Bush.

Iota’s representation of colonial femininity can be compared to similar contemporary discourses. An extract from the colonial paper the *Antipodean* reprinted in *Shafts* boasted of the colonial Australian girl that: “the native daughter of this sun-loved land can hold her own in physical charm as rival to the maids of Europe or America [...] Fearless and open-eyed, she looks out upon the world from babyhood; shyness is an unknown word in her vocabulary”.²⁵ As is suggested of Elizabeth Marrable, the Australian young woman’s assertive nature is fostered by the small, tight-knit colonial community; she is “pretty and fresh, with an ease of

manner acquired by knowing all about everybody, everything in her small world from babyhood upwards”²⁶; moreover her modernity is expressed in her energies and canny goals for bringing about her nuptials: “[h]er flirtations [...] are pronounced and inartistic; but she keeps her weather eye open and means to commit matrimony speedily, with money, if possible”.²⁷ Although she is sexually assertive, the writer comfortingly assures us that the energies of the “Antipodean Girl” always land her at the proper ends of married motherhood and the domestic: “with an annual new baby [...] our girl becomes one of those belauded matrons whose sphere is strictly private and domestic”.²⁸

In *A Comedy in Spasms*, Elizabeth’s physiology and behaviour make her a “specimen” of interest to the elderly natural historian Miss Sefton: “I came over to get a better purchase on the habits of that combination-beast of theirs, the Platypus, and their other monstrosities; but, upon my word, I found more entertainment among their young women”(CS 79); and later, to a chemist who declares that “[t]hat Australian type [...] is more like a magnificent impression than a finished study; it interests me”; he muses whether it is, “the lack of leavening salts from the decay of ancient things, for which we must thank this strange type”(CS 254).

If the “new”, unfinished, Australian type of female is free from “the decay of ancient things”, there is nevertheless an association with the prehistoric “uncivilised” Australia made here in the suggestion that the Bush environment (savage Nature) stimulates modifications which are characteristic of an atavistic “throwing back”. Dizzied in her courtship with her lover Tom Temple, Elizabeth “lost something of that radiant, light-hearted dignity which good sound British blood acquires when well mixed with the sunlight and air of the South. She went back some generations; at a bound she grew kittenish, and consciously made people uncomfortable”(CS 102). Close proximity to “savage” Nature produces a female subjectivity

which in its obedience to the free play of instincts, challenges customs of Western culture. Yet these “primitive” feelings are prompted by a discerning feminine predilection for the morally fittest.

Iota deplores the way in which the making of eugenically fit matches are impeded by the social and class conventions of marriage arrangements (Tom is nominally engaged, by a prior family interest, to an aristocrat) which block human evolutionary progress; observing the flirtatious activities of Miss Marrable, Miss Sefton demands to know “what that fraud Selection is pottering after, that he can’t chip in and clinch matters”(CS 112). Moral codes of femininity (restraint, propriety, sexual passivity) are under strain from the instinct for a sexual maternity in which sexuality is sublimated into, or fused with maternity; a powerful female force figured here as so excessive as to be almost transgressive. The handsome colonel holding her hand arouses Elizabeth’s romantic interest in him but her desire is immediately sublimated into an intense maternal longing which is simultaneously a retreat from sexuality; as soon as she leaves Temple’s company she fetches her baby sister Judith and brings her to her cabin to cuddle and sleep with her. Retreating “in an agony of surprise, fear, shame and dawning delight, [she] attempted to sort her sensations; but all she could do was to long, in a way that hurt her horribly, to touch some beloved thing – some warm, soft living thing that yet had neither wisdom or knowledge”(CS 107).

The observations of Miss Sefton spell out to the reader that Elizabeth is unusually “fit” and ready for motherhood: “one rarely finds, as in this case [...] that a mere flirtation causes the face of the girl to shine, and tells her how to hold a baby”(CS 106). The necessity of female choice and agency in marriage is encoded in this force which cannot be made to fit the manners and sensibilities of upper middle-class decorum. Such a marriage, by leading to the dangers of infidelity can only be immoral. A chemist friend of Prynne’s granted the authority

of scientific discourse, warns of the dangers of the sexual appetites of the advanced colonial girl: “[s]avage or civilised, ma’am, I stick to my point, in a childless home, with no natural outlets, tied for life to a saintly foggy [...] she’ll come some cropper, by the mere impetus of that physique of hers”(CS 151). Here the biology of the eugenically fit female “type” is explicitly linked to a strong sexual instinct or drive toward a socially acceptable object: maternity. Caffyn’s plea for the new daughters to make suitable marriages are not so much those outside of the interests of the market – Tom Temple is landed gentry – but those which allow women their proper role of *childbearing*.

In his *Maps of Englishness* Simon Gikandi illustrates how discourses of empire in the period often destabilised oppressive domestic ideologies of femininity through evoking the adventure, romance and utopia of travel for the female subject.²⁹ In a related way, Caffyn utilises the heroine’s contact with the margin (the colony) to question specific, limited dimensions of the cultural hegemony of the centre. Socio-historically, the late nineteenth-century ship for leisure travel and emigration features as a place for contracting marriages.³⁰ The motif of the voyage simultaneously evokes romance and adventure as it resolves the displacement of the colonial woman traveller, diminishing and containing it by directing her toward the domestic and to the metropole; it is not her domestic enclosure which is regretted here, but the particular marriage which she makes.

On board the culturally liminal space of the P&O ship – a space, Kerryn Goldsworthy in her reading of nineteenth-century travel narratives has argued, which is negotiated by its passengers in attempt to secure the boundaries of identity under threat of collapse³¹ – gender roles and identities are explored and reaffirmed. The two protagonists enjoy a heightened romance inaugurated by the proximity of the exotic Orient. Miss Sefton declares:

I believe it's that very quality in these Eastern lands that has such an attraction for us women. The audacity, the splendour, the fine finish of the sins sinned in those lands of dreams, draw our hearts to them, just as irresistibly as does the memory of those countless holy feet that have trodden their desert places (*CS* 85).

The alterity of the Orient here, illuminates the duality of the New Woman in which pilgrim purity and erotic decadence might co-exist. But the new femininity which Caffyn endorses is routed toward the domestic, an interior topos in which the heart becomes the proper territory for feminine exploration:

every woman is by nature an explorer, her undiscovered countries the hearts of men; and the more remote and inaccessible, the more desirable do they seem. The heart of Temple had suddenly become for Elizabeth Marrable the Central Africa of her desire, a great unknown land, full of mysteries, the sands of which no foot of woman had yet trodden (*CS* 107).

In common with other New Woman narratives, the novel articulates anxieties about the current degenerative state of masculinity. As a male affair, Empire provides fruitless, or even fatal, contact for male characters in this text: Mr Marrable's entrepreneurial enterprises fail, his prize race horse perishes in the inhospitable terrain of the Bush, and his bankruptcy and subsequent death are what cause the family to return to England. Precipitating Elizabeth's marriage to an Englishman (rather than a colonial) these events signal the novel's preoccupation with the consolidation of Englishness.

The eugenic discourses of “race” in the novel’s characterisations appear to be recognised in Annie E. Holdsworth’s review in the *Signal*; she congratulates the author: “the development in Temple’s character is excellent and the author has succeeded admirably in her delineation of a healthy, wholesome, natural and honourable Englishman”.³² The romance plot presents three types of manhood from which Elizabeth must select the most fit. Her first suitor the ostentatious Count Ferdinand Fitz-Clarence Falconer, although suitably moneyed, is a decadent figure who has supersensitive nerves and poor eyesight, an over-fondness for “china shepherdesses”; “rose draped boudoirs with soft scented air” and “eternally tired women”, and an Aesthete’s aversion to “bright green”(CS 23) – corrupt tendencies which a discerning Elizabeth regrets would not have belonged to his Crusader descendants. Her objections identify his eugenic unfitness: his poor physical qualities (he has poor eyesight) and his almost unspeakably unmanly, Aesthete’s accessories: “ ‘[y]ou seem to me like an echo or something better, a sort of ghost of your crusading ancestors and things – which – somehow your eye glass belies; and this –’ she picked up a scented monographed handkerchief and handed it to him with a small grimace – ‘this’ – ”(CS 23).

It is the handsome sporting Tom Temple, a “Thor come down among us with a boy’s face”(CS 88), whose physique marks him out as a favoured contender in the struggle for survival, to whom Elizabeth sacrifices her heart. The racial significance of his “type” is not lost on the scientifically trained eye of Miss Sefton: “ ‘he’ll get the best in life by the divine right of Bulk’ ”(CS 88) – but the financial hardship of her family forces Elizabeth into a marriage with the distinctly dysgenic, but wealthy, Colonel Richard Prynne. Short and yellow skinned, he measures his weakly physique and matrimonial intentions against the wholesome purity of the aptly named Temple with commendable eugenic responsibility: “he contrasted the two: himself, a small, big-headed bundle of imperative nerve-centres on a pair of spindle

shanks, and the young giant, brain and body proportioned to a nicety with every nerve normally at rest”(CS 101).

In an unusual reconfiguration and reversal of the New Woman intellectual as hysteric or neurasthenic, Prynne is progressively pathologised. Debilitated by mental exhaustion, it is clear that he will be unable to fulfil his wife’s overwhelming desire for motherhood. His contact with the colonial frontier only invalidates his masculinity as he slides into the effeminate hysterical symptoms of headaches and invalidism. His body is effectively emasculated from the overstraining of the intellect, and, it is implied, from the immoral weight of his goals: destruction and killing in the South African colonies. Elizabeth describes her husband as designing the ultimate weapons with which to dispatch African natives with religious fervour:

[h]e sits in his room praying for a war, and wallows, in anticipation, in the blood it’s going to shed. It’s instructive to watch him. No bishop ever brought more fervour to the composition of a charge to confound a mutinous diocese, than Richard brings to his preparation of his instrument of destruction. Patriotism is a beautiful sentiment, but Oh! – oh! how dull it is! A horror, too, for its seems always associated with the blood of blacks (CS 168).

The horror of imperial domination and warfare is pitted against an essentialist feminine principle of regeneration and creation; for the tragedy, Caffyn signals, lies in the thwarting of the womanly patriotism which Elizabeth’s racial motherhood would enact.

At first Elizabeth clandestinely meets Tom, but Caffyn’s romantic narrative does not countenance the possibility of her heroine leaving the invalid husband for her lusty, healthy

lover. Instead the author martyrs her to a barren marriage in which her maternal instinct is redirected toward the care and love of her husband. Despite handling the liberating possibilities mobilised by imperial travel and colonial spaces, ultimately Iota submits her protagonist to a traditional configuration of female subjectivity.

These readings of two of Caffyn's novels demonstrate that the terms New Woman and anti-New Woman writers, feminist or anti-feminist, are not sufficiently stable categories to have meaning in this context. Iota, whilst temporarily examining, and positively evaluating attributes of the New Woman, such as assertiveness, and criticising the ignorance of women in the sexual exchange made in marriage and its repugnance as a duty for married women, makes a limited, and selected criticism of social and material conditions for certain Victorian women. Her novels inhabit a corner of the field of New Woman fiction which rehearses some of the key debates of social-purity feminism; whilst *A Yellow Aster* is acerbic and pointed in its critique of women's sexual ignorance, the more light-hearted, comic approach of *A Comedy in Spasms* lacks the proselytising edge of, for example Grand's moral purity. But the endings of her novels proscribe not only that women remain within the hegemonic structures of womanhood, but that these offer women their ultimate and fulfilling purpose; so although she does target feminist ideas, Iota cannot be described only as an anti-feminist writer.

The second author whose work I will discuss, Victoria Cross(e) – referred to henceforth as Cross – also had an ambivalent status as a New Woman writer and her work exhibits contradiction about the feminist foundations for new female subjectivities. Victoria Cross (1868-1952) – the pen name of Annie Sophie Cory (also known as Vivian Cory) – was born at Rawalpindi in Punjab. Her father was an officer in the Bengal army and editor of the Civil and Military Gazette of Lahore and a critic of British policy. Cross grew up in Karachi and lived for many years in India. In the same year as Caroline Emily Cameron's *The Man*

Who Didn't, following Allen's *The Woman Who Did*, John Lane published Victoria Cross's novella *The Woman Who Didn't*. Shoshana Milgram Knapp in a study of Cross's career claims that its original title was *Consummation* and suggests that when John Lane changed its title it was "misleadingly marketed as if it were a rejoinder to Grant Allen's novel".³³ I agree that the novel is a more fluid response to Grant Allen's novel than the riposte that its title suggests, but will identify the ways in which the story does in fact explicitly engage with and share some ground with Allen's ideology.

Barbara Arnett Melchiori finds the plot to be "trite"³⁴ and argues that the "reformation of a rake" was "to Victoria Crosse, as to the great majority of her sister novelists, the unquestioned duty of any good woman",³⁵ and thus that the novel was one typical of the period. However, many moral purist women novelists were vehemently rejecting the plot of reforming the rake and the sacrifice of young women to sexually predatory, diseased men which they saw masked by such ideology, such as Sarah Grand in *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) whilst other writers like Menie Muriel Dowie in *Gallia* (1895) treated the rake more leniently for new, eugenic reasons. I will suggest that *The Woman Who Didn't* does not present female duty uncritically, that the representation of place and identities in the novel suggests greater ambivalence in the plot than Arnett Melchiori suggests. As I consider what kind of New Woman Cross represents in her fiction, I will explore key aspects of New Woman identity in these two novels: sexuality and modernity, as they are produced through a relation to imperialism and colonial alterity.

In *The Woman Who Didn't*³⁶ Eurydice Williamson develops a friendship with an Army man Evelyn whom she meets on a trip to Egypt, but his romantic intentions toward her are confounded when he discovers that she is married. His character is not particularly pleasant; he is brash in his manner and jaded, but he begins to be reformed by Eurydice's

philosophical and intellectual outlook and the love for her they inspire; yet the chaste nature of their relationship eventually causes him to revert to his dissolute ways. They continue their relationship in London but he decides to go abroad again, and Eurydice's husband returns home from business.

The story opens with a disembodied female voice in the "foggy duskiness of an Egyptian night" (*TWWD* 1) commanding the dishonourable British passengers on the Egyptian river boat to pay the African boatmen their required fee to join the ship. The woman's retort to a passenger about the boatmen: "[t]hey were not the least insolent, and they were perfectly justified in demanding their money" (*TWWD* 1) signals that she is just and compassionate. Her authoritative position, public speech and organisation indicate the confidence of the New Woman. Yet what is presented as humane morality in contrast with British arrogance and violence (a British Missionary swears and strikes an Egyptian with his walking stick) is nonetheless, simply a more benevolent facet of imperial identity. Her exchange with the Egyptians has an almost paternalistic cast: " '[n]ow, have you all the fares?' asked the voice gently. 'Yes madam; thanks to you madam; thank you madam,' answered the glib tones of the native" (*TWWD* 6). Eurydice's display of power positions the Egyptians as subordinate to her, her authoritative presence in the text is constructed in relation to their passivity. Empire then, is the crucial context in which this New Woman character of authority and independence is produced. Modernity and bourgeois identity are predicated on colonial dominance.

The heroine of the story adheres martyr-like to her principles in respect of her commitment to the conjugal bond. Associated with "the century of Orpheus" (*TWWD* 34) – evoking a Hellenistic age ³⁷ – the definition of Eurydice's femininity is reinforced through her difference to another type on board ship which Cross draws. There is a New Woman Amy, who dresses in man's clothes, smokes a cigar and sits crossed-legged on the deck, whom

Evelyn perceives to be associated with “the American girl, slang, modern fastness, and other disagreeable things”(*TWWD* 33). Eurydice is a New Woman heroine with an eroticised gender ambiguity, signalled in the effect that her unconventional manner and look has on the narrator, “the tall form beside me in its impenetrable clothing seemed to exercise a confusing influence over me” (*TWWD* 9). Evelyn learns that Eurydice is sleeping on the “wrong side” of the boat:

“ ‘[I]eft side ? That’s the men’s side’, I remarked carelessly. ‘Oh, they don’t divide us very distinctly in these French boats!’ ”(*TWWD* 8); Eurydice’s disregard for boundaries inscribes the ship and the independent female traveller within sexual adventure. In *Comedy in Spasms* the boundaries of this space are explored and controlled as I have suggested, but the seascape here is rendered metaphorically to signify fluidity and freedom from boundaries,³⁸ in what Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik have termed a “landscape of desire”.³⁹ Geographical space and the absence of markers or boundaries are significant in the narrative structure which moves from the liminal zone of a boat, and landscape of the sea, from colonial Egypt recently invaded by the British (1882), to the domestic spaces of the metropole, a trajectory which traces the expansion and confinement of female sexual and gender roles.

Eurydice’s gradual loss of authority and independence are conveyed through domestic images of enclosure. Her location in the closed space of the box at the theatre she attends with Evelyn – which he compares unfavourably with the erotic possibilities of cultural space of the café at Port Said: the “smoking oil lamps, the blatant strident music, and the narrow benches of the Egyptian *café*”(*TWWD*152) – enclose her, and finally the “prosaic detail” (*TWWD* 128) of tea-making in her drawing room sees her hemmed in by bamboo furniture and attendant servants. Their surroundings reflect the new propriety with which their relations must be conducted in contrast to the easy intimacy afforded by the ship. To the narrator

Eurydice's home conveys a purity and simplicity almost austere, opposed to the luxury and decadence of his "bachelor haunts": "the straight stemmed palms on the different tables, in the slim, narrow-seated chairs and pale hard satin couch. There was no scent in the air, not even of flowers" (*TWDD* 121). Mrs Williamson's husband's return at the end of the novel reinforces her confinement and loss of freedom and mobility. Her independence is diminished physically, emotionally, spiritually when she is back in the fog of the London streets.

Despite *The Woman Who Didn't*'s titular antagonism to Grant Allen's treatment of free-love unions, this novel does comment on the Victorian dichotomy of purity/contamination through its questioning of the value of certain principles for female sexual identity and the promotion of others. George Robb notes that "social purity feminists especially condemned the eugenic writings of Wells and Allen, which they saw as an affront to feminine virtue";⁴⁰ he connects Cross with this group, adding that "*The Woman Who Did* provoked several literary responses to uphold feminine honour, including "Victoria Cross"'s *The Woman Who Didn't*".⁴¹ However, Cross, I would argue, in fact shared some of Allen's values on female virtue and purity. Indeed, Cross can perhaps be more readily identified with the group of "progressive eugenicists" amongst whom numbered Shaw, Wells, Ellis, Schreiner and Marie Stopes. For such figures, Victorian sexual morality was itself the problem, and as Robb argues, they identified the source of degeneration as "a matter not of sexual excess, but of sexual repression".⁴² Cross's early short story 'Theodora: A Fragment' published in Lane's *Yellow Book* in 1895, is of ambivalent stance on sexual morality; Theodora, who will lose all her considerable fortune on her marriage is more liberated than constrained by the conditions of her inheritance. The narrator's desire for the beautiful Theodora is configured as an extension of the doctrine of art for art's sake to pleasure for its own sake, in which sexuality is divorced – even liberated – from Nature and its use-value, i.e.,

maternity. Separating pleasure and desire from eugenic ends, the (male) narrator opines that the “sharpest, most violent, stimulus we may say, the true essence of pleasure, lies in some gratification which has no claim, whatever, in any sense, to be beneficial or useful, or to have any ulterior motive, conscious or instinctive”.⁴³ The fragmentary form of the narrative condones the sexually assertive behaviour of its androgynous female protagonist Theodora, for the story has an open ending, abruptly finishing on a passionate kiss between the two acquaintances, without authorial recrimination or resolution. Cross explores these dimensions of sexual relationships in relation to the inequities of the marriage system for women in her novels.

In *The Woman Who Didn't* Cross questions the value of female chastity by drawing on popular bio-medical discourses of degeneration and entropy which enjoyed currency within eugenic circles: for example, the construct of a body whose economy was organised through the expenditure of finite amounts of bodily vitality or energy corresponding to task. The issue of chastity, and by extension, monogamy, is complicated when the narrator asks, rhetorically, if such virtue might not be injurious to the human organism in its growth. At a significant juncture in the narrator/lover's moral and intellectual growth through his relationship with Eurydice, comes the realisation that the cause of degeneration is purity, as defined by hegemonic Victorian moral values:

[w]as it possible that an enforced protracted course of virtue is really as enfeebling, as enervating to the finer moral constitution as a course of vice? Perhaps there is something attenuating the mental fibres in long continued virtue: the soul, the heart, the moral muscles become cramped by it: they are deprived of all the movement and exercise natural to them, in the fervours of repentance, passionate remorse and agonised regret

consequent upon error, and they degenerate as the body does, of which all its muscles are not brought properly into play. Could it be that Eurydice had degenerated during six months of immaculate virtue, as I had during six months of virtue's opposite? (*WWD* 116)

Whilst we cannot straightforwardly identify Cross with the male narrator/persona, there is some evidence that the value of principles of purity are in question. Because we have witnessed her reforming influence on him, and his growing spiritual development and self-interrogation, the reader is led to give some endorsement to the conclusion which the male narrator Evelyn, draws about virtue. Male and female sexual desire repressed or denied expression becomes injurious to bodily and spiritual health; a view held by the “progressive” eugenists. Experience is recodified, not as sin which degenerates the sinner, but instead the “fervours of repentance, passionate remorse and agonised regret” (*TWWD* 115) are a range productive of somatic effects vital to personal growth. Evelyn’s dissipated pleasures and morally weak conduct are the result of his deprivation of consummation of his “purer” affair with Eurydice – a view of course perilously close to the masculine rationalisation of male sexual licence. The narrator declares that

since principles are nothing more than obstinate prejudices against certain acts, and a highly principled man means nothing more than an individual whose prejudices are very obstinate, very numerous, and against those acts which the community he happens to be living in is also prejudiced against (*TWWD* 79).

Thus Cross historicises principles, making the distinction between absolute moral laws, and culturally relative ones; anticipating a time when the institution of marriage and existing

divorce laws will be reformed. Like Allen then, Cross also interrogates the principles of sexual monogamy in order to promote a notion of physiological equilibrium and optimum health. Whereas for Allen “free love” or the discussion of different formations of socio-sexual relations is teleological – he advocates changes in female identity which lead to the goal of motherhood – Cross makes sexual and sensual experience an end in itself. Maternity does not feature in this narrative, which generates questions about female self-integrity and identity within the confines of patriarchal laws. Cross’s young, intelligent, intellectual and beautiful heroine chooses not to be unfaithful to the husband with whom she is *unhappily* married, claiming that her duty, or what her lover calls her “martyrdom”, is “an infinite peace” (*WWD* 130). The author appears to defend the value of fidelity and integrity upon which it rests, not the quality of martyrdom to which she condemns her heroine, clearly sympathising with the possibilities denied to young women married early to an inappropriate or unfaithful partner.

Infanticide, miscegenation and the New Woman

My analysis of the New Woman, race-motherhood and infanticide in Cross’s later novel, *Anna Lombard* (1901) will necessitate historically and culturally situating infanticide by looking at previous literary treatments in the nineteenth-century and their relationship to constructions of maternity, culture and eugenics. Shifts in medical and social opinion over the deviance of working-class mothers witnessed since the 1860s⁴⁴ meant that infanticide and abortion amongst young, working-class women – as fallen women – were treated more favourably by juries and the public later in the century. Attempts to understand the impoverished social and economic conditions which prompted such murders exemplify the humanitarian critique narrative which Josephine McDonagh identifies below.

An article in the *Westminster Review* 'A Crime and its Causes'⁴⁵ examines some of the recent cases involving abortion and infanticide, and compares the perception of two cases of women who committed infanticide – Collins and Whitmarsh – in the public mind. The article sharply divides the two cases in terms of the women's relative class and marital status. Working-class and unmarried women, such as Whitmarsh, are not considered deviant in being infanticidal mothers; deviance is a label reserved for middle-class, married women, as in the Collins case. Mrs Collins a middle-class woman, had procured an abortion, and was married and living with her husband, consequently her criminal act was seen as highly immoral and contradictory to the essential nature of womanly feeling. The writer suggests: "[h]ow unnatural is the life, how utterly selfish is the nature, that can lead women of this class to the commission of so unnatural an act, it is needless to argue."⁴⁶ It is the middle-class woman who seeks to control her sexual reproduction within marriage who is labelled deviant, and not the working-class woman, as was the case earlier in the century. As the one whom ideals are bestowed upon, the middle-class mother who is infanticidal proves the greatest threat to ideological constructions of motherhood. Investigating the causes of infanticide and bestowing blame, the author notes the stigma of illegitimacy and the conferral of moral opprobrium by an unsympathetic and censorious public, and highlights the economic factors which drive poor women to murder:

[b]y far the greatest number of instances occur in respect of women who, not being married, are only too surely aware that the birth of a child will mean their complete and eternal social degradation – a degradation which in all probability will leave them no alternatives but starvation or the acceptance of the lot of the professional harlot. When it is clearly understood why, to a woman who has been guilty of any sexual irregularity, these

two terrible alternatives alone offer themselves, then it will be better understood who is responsible for the frequent resort to the criminal and dangerous practice.⁴⁷

The writer finds the State responsible for the woman's crime in not making the father responsible to pay maintenance of the child. By not belonging to a patriarchally headed household, and to a father, the "bastard" is considered a nobody, without a claim to citizenship: "such children belong to nobody except to their mothers" the writer states, evoking the ancient legal doctrine of *Filius Nullius*⁴⁸ in which a bastard was technically "nobody's child" and thus the community's responsibility. It also suggests the hypocrisy of Victorian society that did not bestow any real authority on motherhood. In both law and public regard, the motherhood of the unmarried mother is valueless because these women were thought unable to support themselves and their offspring.

Urging greater social acceptance of, and financial and legal support for the unmarried mother in order to reduce the number of abortions and infanticide, the author of the *Westminster Review* article gives some support for the illegitimate child, conceding that, "[l]ogically speaking, the child that is born subject to the disadvantage of illegitimacy should have more care bestowed upon it than is bestowed upon children who are legitimate".⁴⁹ But there is an underlying eugenic agenda in the concept of bastardy and fitness in the article, which can be situated between the two contemporary positions which Lionel Rose has identified:

[f]rom the 1890s the worth of the bastard was the subject of two intellectually opposed outlooks; a small but esteemed eugenic elite saw him as innately unfit, a view that allowed

moral prejudice to distort scientific objectivity; but the increasingly prevailing opinion recognised his potential if given a fair start in life.⁵⁰

In my discussion of Grant Allen's fiction in chapter 2 I have indicated that the eugenic positions on the worth of the bastard make for a more complex picture than Rose outlines here; the eugenicist advocates of "free love" sought to promote the concept of the increased vitality, even superiority, of the child born out of wedlock. Illegitimate infants had in the earlier part of the nineteenth-century been regarded as unfortunate and their infanticide as even fortuitous. However, the infanticide and abortion of the working-class illegitimate baby came to be seen as desirable for the eugenic basis of a fitter society: "[c]hildren thus born, with everything against them, might reasonably be regarded as, and not improbably are, the material from which the criminal classes are recruited."⁵¹ As such their value as potential citizens was doubtful and their destruction could be sanctioned for the eugenic ends it would serve: "[i]s it not to the interest of the State, is it not to the interest of society that such children should be put out of the way?"⁵² Lionel Rose notes that although it was an intellectually powerful discourse, the eugenic research of Karl Pearson and the eugenic Biometric Laboratory of University College London did not receive implementation in law; the Minority Report of the 1909 Royal Commission on the Poor Law defended the worth of bastard children, arguing that "there is no scientific justification for the assumption that the preventable deaths of infants either result in the survival of the fittest [...] or tend to the improvement of the race".⁵³ The questions of illegitimacy in this article are pertinent to Cross's *Anna Lombard*, in particular the question of the construction of class difference in maternal instinct and naturalness. As Jill L. Matus notes on the mid-century debates over infanticide, "[t]he controversy about the cause and incidence of infanticide reinforces the

recognition that constructions of motherhood and maternal instinct were ideologically central, if internally inconsistent”.⁵⁴

Josephine McDonagh in her study of literary representations of infanticide in Britain from the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century has contended that they are “best understood as symptoms of unresolved problems within the conceptualisation of civilised or modern society”.⁵⁵ She identifies two narratives of what constitutes a civilised society during this period; a version which sees infanticide as the epitome of savagery and outside of civilised society, and a second in which infanticide figures in a humanitarian critique of rational society.⁵⁶

Colonised people form a cultural locus for such “savage” behaviours: Sarah Grand in *The Beth Book* says of the poor Irish community in which Beth grows up, “[i]t was the boast of the place that there were no illegitimate children; it would have been a better sign if there had been”.⁵⁷ Grand here draws on colonial stereotypes in which the Irish are coded as “savage”. Her remark even slyly – and offensively – implies the Irish community actually commit the barbaric practice of infanticide in order to present their “façade” of civilisation. Similarly, the context of India in *Anna Lombard* is significant for the way in which Indian society was considered barbaric by British imperialists for its high rate of female infanticide, yet questions and disturbs the terms.⁵⁸ At the turn of the century, with the emergence of the new science of eugenics and the forging of national imperial identities for the New Woman, the representation of infanticide departs from the oppositions in the earlier period identified by McDonagh in her study.

George Eliot had raised questions about the source of “proper” maternal instinct in *Adam Bede* (1859) in her representation of Hetty Sorrel and her act of infanticide. Hetty is a fallen woman whose infanticide we are invited to read as a response to her social condition, which

makes her a figure for compassion.⁵⁹ Jill L. Matus argues that Eliot's text "reveals that the biological fact of motherhood is itself by the smallest of passports to maternal responsibility and attachment [...] mothering is a conscious and relational activity that requires its own specific capacity".⁶⁰ Matus argues that in addition, Eliot challenged biomedical discourse on female beauty as fittedness for motherhood, and problematised how we could interpret women's proper role from "reading" nature.

Later in the century, George Egerton's 'Wedlock', a short story from her collection *Discords* (1894) offers complementary, rather than competing, scientific and feminist interpretations, of the motives of its infanticidal woman who kills her three step-children. Forbidden by her husband to visit her illegitimate, and beloved, daughter she turns to drink in her distress. When she finds out that her daughter has died, and that her husband withheld the news of her illness from her, her grief and anger are so great that she revenges herself on her husband by murdering her three step-children. The story offers social, psychological and biological reasons behind an infanticidal mother. In a dialogue between two workmen outside her house, a sympathetic bricklayer tells his colleague that his own wife is a drunk, and that his understanding of and compassion for her behaviour was increased after reading about the hereditary disposition to alcoholism: "Sam, she can't 'elp it no more nor the colour of 'er 'air".⁶¹ The story does not deny the biological essentialism of this narrative in its treatment of its mother subject, but offers an equally compelling explanation in the woman's oppressive marriage. Rather than being the enabling condition and context for loving motherhood, the wedlock of the title of the story thwarts the mother's desire to obey her maternal instinct. The protagonist's bastard child is legitimised above her stepchildren by Egerton so that the mother's homicides become a revengeful expression of maternal love.

The double infanticides in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895) are committed by Little Father Time, an almost allegorical character whom critics have remarked disrupts the realism of the novel.⁶² By having a child murderer Hardy displaces the issue of infanticide away from the mother, who was the chief subject for social concern over infanticide in public accounts; yet this displacement highlights the circumstances of the parenting in poverty and social ostracism. Unlike Anna Lombard's infanticide which brings the narrative and development of the heroine to a positive conclusion, the murders have a profoundly negative impact upon the heroine, Sue Bridehead, developing the subsequent tragedy of the novel in which she is reduced to depression and hysteria. Little Father Time's suicide note explains his act as a response to their poverty and the constraints it puts on Sue and Jude's parenting.

The "unnaturalness" of the New Woman was expressed by critics by linking her with infanticide. Hugh Stutfield in 'Tommyrotics', an essay on the degeneration of contemporary literature by New Women and aesthetes, objected to the indelicacy of the discussion of infanticide which he saw as the latest phase on the marriage question.⁶³ And in an article in the *Westminster Review* 'The Strike of a Sex' which reviews Irma von Troll-Borostyani's book on sex equality, the Austrian author is described as a Malthusian who advocates State child-care, abolition of religion and greater access to divorce.⁶⁴ The critic sarcastically outlines Von Troll-Borostyani's plans for resolving the problem of unwanted children, made with the aid of "science":

[c]hloroform has done wonders; given in the right dose, it will quench life painlessly; and before the use of reason (as, indeed afterwards!) what are children, above all superfluous infants, but an arrangement of molecules? To chloroform, therefore – and perhaps fine and

imprisonment of parents without a Malthusian conscience – we could always turn in the last resort.⁶⁵

Eugenics are evoked when the writer suggests that this means of addressing the “superfluity of infants which so liberal an Utopia would bring” is to satisfy the objections of “Malthus or Mr. Karl Pearson”. With the implementation of State maternity care, these “scientific” principles would be the basis for the sexual equality and reforms in maternity which the New Woman seeks. And, as I showed in chapter 2, infanticide by chloroform had also featured in literature as the means by which eugenic policies could be implemented in a future society in Grant Allen’s satirical short story ‘The Child of the Phalanstery’ first published in *Belgravia* in 1884.

In Cross’s *Anna Lombard* the infanticide plot violently enacts eugenic imperatives for racial purity in the name of empire-building. Because the narrative of *Anna Lombard* is not very well known I shall briefly summarise the plot. The narrator Gerald Ethridge is a young man of intellectual and refined sensibilities in the Indian Civil Service. At a ball he meets Anna, the daughter of General Lombard. Anna’s qualities signal that she is a New Woman: she was educated until she was twenty-one, she can speak Greek, is intellectual, and is (initially) assertive. They fall in love but do not profess it to each other. Gerald is then stationed in Burma (which had come under British rule in 1886) for five years, and so decides not to propose to Anna. After only a year he is posted back to Anna’s station, and proposes marriage to her. Anna accepts Gerald’s proposal, but has married her Pathan servant Gaida Khan, in a secret native ceremony. When Anna finally reveals that she is married to Gaida, Gerald decides to wait for her to free herself and remains faithful. When Gaida contracts cholera Gerald nurses him as best he can, but the Indian man dies. Anna discovers she is

pregnant, and she and Gerald are married as quickly as possible. When the baby is born Anna is overcome by a maternal instinct, which excludes Gerald. Sensing this will end their relationship, she suffocates the baby. In remorse she exiles herself from Gerald for a year, after which period of repentance they are blissfully reunited to start their life together.

What kind of New Woman is Anna Lombard? How is Empire constructed in relation to femininity and modernity in this novel? I will argue that, as in *The Woman Who Didn't*, Cross produces a formation of New Womanhood which is saturated with the values and power structures of Empire. Miscegenation in India earlier in the century had been seen as an effective colonial strategy; by integrating the British with their subjects, mutinies and division of interests would be minimised. This would in turn produce an “enlightened race”, although this belief was eventually countered in British Colonial Office policy.⁶⁶ Sir George Campbell MP, Governor of Bengal and eugenics advocate addressed himself to the problems facing the stability of the British Empire in 1887 and its attendant responsibilities. He found that the “greatest difficulty of all is the immense variety of races of which the British Empire is composed [...] in all our foreign possessions we have, more or less, the aboriginal races still subsisting;”⁶⁷ this he felt, presented significant problems as far as self-government was concerned. Fears about the control over British India were concerned not only with governmental and military administrations, in which Anglo-Indians were a small minority of the population,⁶⁸ but with the interracial mixture of the population and the way in which this might blur boundaries of colonial identity and racial hierarchies. Margaret Macmillan argues that “[c]hildren were a sign that the British were established in India, that the community was ‘sound’ [...] the presence of white children showed that British men had firmly abjured the bad old practice of keeping Indian mistresses”.⁶⁹ However, signifying the establishment of the British Empire through the presence of white Anglo-Indian children would always be

problematic and viewed with ambivalence by the community. Such children were generally sent to England at an early age to be encultured in Englishness, so did not in fact, feature very visibly in the colonial community. The evidence of white children did not simply signify a lack of interracial sexual relations, because the military frequented brothels of native women. Paxton indicates how there was a lack of national, ideological consensus over inter-racial sex at this time in India, citing Phillipa Levine who suggests that: “increasingly over the course of the nineteenth century, commercial sex between colonising men and women rather than concubinage or other more permanent or monogamous liaisons became the preferred colonial practice, more particularly in military circles.”⁷⁰

In her book on rape in the British colonial imagination *Writing under the Raj*, Paxton suggests how female-authored interracial romances, including Cross’s *Life of My Heart*, undermine the post-Mutiny (1857) rape script of male romance.⁷¹ Cross’s New Man in *Anna Lombard*, in the form of Gerald Etheridge, acts in different ways. His experience is a cautionary tale which serves to highlight the dangers of repression of sexuality and late marriage and to question the value of sexual purity. Through his characterisation and narrative, Cross enables the reader a greater depiction of female sexual desire, in particular through Etheridge’s observations of the female “gaze”. While Cross seems to move toward a sympathetic portrayal of interracial marriage, in which Gaida is romanticised and granted nobility, dignity and tenderness, Cross’s representation is one of profound instability as a result of an eroticisation of violence between colonised and coloniser. The interracial relationship at the centre of this novel is a wholly ambivalent fantasy, enacting what Robert Young has called “colonial desire”, characterised by a structure of simultaneous sexual attraction to and repulsion from other races in Western culture.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, reviewers pathologised Anna's sexuality, finding her "hysterically sexual" and part of "an amazing and impossible nightmare of voluptuous phenomena".⁷² However despite this objection, one critic conceded that "Miss Cross's imaginative power and her gift of lucid and direct writing are indisputable. The book is often brilliant"; only by ignoring the colonial discourse can the critic conclude that she "*simply* uses India, as recently she used the Klondyke, as the immense theatre of an immense passion"(my italics).⁷³ A notice of the novel in the *Academy* of 1901 cites an unnamed critic, cynically described as "heady",⁷⁴ who makes the prediction that Cross will become another Marie Corelli (we must assume that they are referring to Corelli's best-selling popularity with readers). The reviewer recognises Cross's sex-role reversal in the novel, to which they would have been alerted by the androgynous characterisations of her earlier fictions such as 'Theodora: A Fragment', and problematises the sex of the author. Cross ("the lady") the reviewer suggests "imagines herself to be a man",⁷⁵ and a quotation in which the male narrator Gerald, introduces himself is given to illustrate the way in which the this female authored novel is written as a first (male) person narrative. The reviewer then names the narrator the "hero-lady", meaning Gerald/Cross. First-person narratives written by women for male characters were hardly unusual at this time, but I suggest that what the reviewers took exception to was the way in which Cross deployed her male narrator to voice a female, and feminist, perspective, particularly in regard to the female "gaze". As a result of the way in which Gerald inhabits a "feminine" role, the narrative is riddled with ambiguities; in particular Gerald's representation of Gaida is characterised by outright contradictions. Gaida's relationship with Anna is evoked as both tender and sincere romance, and as the power of a savage "native" over the passive body of a white woman in a post mutiny rape narrative in which we see violence demonstrated by the colonised toward the colonisers.

Shoshana Milgram Knapp praises W. T. Stead as one of the few reviewers of this novel⁷⁶ who, as a feminist sympathiser “not only admired the novel’s intensity but grasped the significance of the role reversals”⁷⁷ in which the heroine was “experiencing a man’s sexual dilemma (as did Anna Lombard)”.⁷⁸ Without problematising the novel’s “intensity” – which could be described as intensely racist, and thus the implications of Stead’s “admiration” – Knapp does not address the significance of the infanticide in terms of race, instead interpreting it as individually motivated; she regards Anna’s feeling for her son as something that “partakes of both incest and the persistence of her passion for Gaida”.⁷⁹ She thereby ignores the literal and ideological violence which is enacted in Cross’s literary infanticide, given the colonial background of anxieties over Eurasian marriages and “mixed race” children.

Melisa Brittain, in her discussion of the critical reception of *Anna Lombard* suggests that Stead’s failure to reconcile Anna’s infanticide with his own interpretation of the novel demonstrates a reliance on the belief that a simple gender role reversal was possible in Cross’s novel, a view which discounts specific formations of race and gender in the colonial setting; Brittain notes, for example, that unlike native women in concubinage to British men, Anna has married Gaida.⁸⁰ By insisting that race and gender are mutually constitutive rather than autonomous categories, Brittain reveals how Stead’s review turns on his own social purity politics and represses the factor which race plays in Anna’s identity as Anglo Indian.⁸¹ Brittain insightfully argues that “Cross makes Anna an active participant in her return to ‘proper’ femininity, and makes visible the racial aspects of ‘the angel in the house’ ”,⁸² an analysis which identifies Anna’s characterisation as a race mother.

Stead clearly found it difficult to countenance the infanticide: “[i]t is much to be regretted that the authoress should have marred so splendid a study by apparently sanctioning

murder”; he suggests that the baby could have been removed from its mother, with or without Anna’s consent, and “[a]fter their own children had been born, the little half-caste might have taken its place in the family”.⁸³ As Brittain has noted, whilst acknowledging that the novel has a strong “purpose” element such a response does not consider that if the infanticide was not necessary for narrative structure, the author had clearly plotted the controversial, and sensational, act to make an ideological point.

Scholars Nancy L. Paxton and Sara Suleri have suggested that Anglo-Indian women writers’ critiques undid colonialism’s master narrative of rape. Cross’s novel engages, and sometimes colludes with the values expressed in the metaphors of possession and conquering traditional to colonial discourse. For example, at the beginning of the novel, the narrator depicts a picturesque India which the reader is invited to consume. Of the beauty of the garden in which he finds Anna is sleeping, Gerald exclaims:

[w]hat a scene it was! one possible only perhaps in India where the stream of Saxon civilisation with all its richness, comfort and wealth flows abruptly into the wonders of native Indian beauty, into that store of gorgeous colouring, of blossoms without name, of scents without definition, of skies and gardens past belief (*AL* 30).

This colonial gaze makes India a “store”, a thing to be consumed and colonised, and yet a place which is simultaneously Edenic, virgin territory, unexplored and unconquered. Even as the colonised country is imagined as unpossessed and as an alterity without name or definition which defies the limits of imagination, this construction generates anxiety to define and contain that colonial alterity. It is an aesthetic which denies the true economic relations between the “Anglo-Saxon” coloniser and colonised India, so that the flow in this interchange

is reversed: British comfort and wealth actually “flows” out of India. The fertility and the sensuality of this perfumed nature become, in their excessiveness, oppressive to Gerald: “I walked down a narrow alley between masses of pomegranate trees and roses and hibiscus and rhododendron, growing all over each other and fainting in each other’s embrace, walked away from the direction of the bands and lost myself at last in the heavy quiet of the garden” (*AL* 178). The novel strives to impart order to the chaos of this picturesque India, with the struggle to define, and repudiate, what those metaphorical “blossoms” – loves without name – are, and to put in place boundaries that restore order for imperial society in terms of “proper” race, class and gender roles.

Whilst *Anna Lombard* does ostensibly critique the literal characterisation of the relationship of colonised men to colonial women as rape in its depiction of their consensual, inter-racial relationship, it is more often figured as violent possession. Suleri argues that “[i]n implicitly rejecting the paradigm of colonialism as rape, the Anglo-Indian woman writer evinces a powerful understanding of the imperial dynamic as a dialogue between competing male anxieties”.⁸⁴ The metaphorical encounter which Suleri refers to is also present in this novel as I have indicated, but its concretisation in the central love triangle is more important. The competing male anxieties about the sexuality of the colonised men, which pose a sexual threat both to white women and to the masculinity of white men, are played out in Gerald’s conflicting depictions of Gaida Khan. When Gerald first sees Gaida he is impressed with his physical beauty and princely stature, and after praising his beauty in the highest terms, concludes: “[i]f I had been a woman I might have been as faithless to Anna as she was now to me for his sake” (*AL* 156); it is a clumsy attempt at conveying male empathy with female sexual transgression, yet these moments in the text highlight Cross’s express intention to do that.

On his way to the fete at which Gerald knows Gaida will be present, participating in a Pathan martial display, Gerald passes Gaida and is reminded of Anna and her love for Gaida. Thinking of Anna watching Gaida's display rouses a violent feeling which is described as racial instinct: "all the Saxon blood rose in my veins and seemed to be living fire" (*AL* 180). But the just Gerald reasons with himself that it would not be fair to fight the Indian man, because; "[h]e was, probably, of the usual weak native constitution and untrained" (*AL* 180) and only a "miserable native, a chetai-wallah, a man who walked with bare feet in the dust of the highway" (*AL* 181). The stereotype of the weak "native" is imposed, despite the fact that Gaida is about to give a display of martial strength and skill. Later, at the fete, Gerald observes the crowds of colonials gathering to watch the Pathans martial display:

I glanced around with a faint feeling of amusement, questioning in my mind what the women thought of this reversing of the order of things in their favour. The stand was mainly filled by women and that they were affected by the unexpectedness and beauty of the scene before them, and moved by the sudden call it made on the senses, was evident (*AL* 189).

As the lover of a woman who is already married, Cross has Gerald see "as a woman", a role which brings a homoerotic countenance to the spectacle. Cross aims to voice the existence of female desire as a normative experience, in order to lend legitimacy to Anna's sexual feelings. The colonial gaze when focusing on Gaida and other Pathans partially displaces their racial and local specificity by classicising them. They are described as "of the Greek type" (*AL* 155), and "looking like animated Greek statues" (*AL* 182) thus fitting their racial physiognomy and figure into certain approved nineteenth-century cultural models of beauty. It is Gerald who

remarks of the Pathans' "somewhat too developed muscles of the hip and waist", that "all were moving, and their play could be seen distinctly under the one surface of fine white linen over them" – from such juxtapositions of gender and the gaze, a homoeroticism embedded in the homosocial, emerges. If it is a homoeroticism then it is also a part of an aestheticising gaze, which acts to control and contain their threat; the spectacle is circumscribed by colonial power.

If the spectacle of the martial strength of the bodies of colonised men reassuringly serves to represent the labouring bodies appropriated by the Anglo-Indian army, it also contains the threat of the mutinous bodies of the natives. For it is suggested that the aestheticised bodies of "the natives" belie their true nature, as expressed in the violence which surfaced during the Mutiny: "how strange and deceitful Nature is at times. Who could believe that these men are the most blood thirsty, perhaps the most fiendishly cruel and certainly the most depraved and vicious race of the earth?" (*AL* 188) Cross also deploys the rape narrative of the "mutiny" or Sepoy rebellion elsewhere to convey the vulnerability of Anna in her marriage to Gaida Khan, which imagines him as a savage killer:

there is the daily, hourly physical danger from a native's insensate jealousy, unreasoning rage, and childish yet fiendish, revenge. A smile bestowed on another, one of those hundred little social amenities or functions fulfilled by his wife not understood in its right sense by the unlettered unthinking barbarian, and a naked corpse, with breasts cut off, and mutilated beyond recognition flung out upon the maidan, are but likely cause and probable result (*AL* 147).

The imperial dynamic of a reverse violent possession is also, sensationally, exploited as a means of enabling the portrayal of a vigorous female sexuality in the New Woman. The narrative is propelled by Gerald's decision not to propose marriage to Anna, a decision, we are led to consider partially responsible for Anna's faulty conduct in marrying her Indian servant. Repression of sexual feeling, as Cross had suggested in *The Woman Who Didn't*, could have negative consequences on physical and psychological health. In Burma where Gerald takes up his new post, he learns that the previous incumbent has committed suicide as a result of his strictly temperate, chaste lifestyle. A doctor at the station advises Gerald of the wisdom of the principle of moderation in life. In this he speaks for Cross, who, in a self-referential gesture, makes her authorial voice chime in with medical opinion:

[y]ou should be moderately moderate. The moderate man is the only one who lives here. Moderately bad, moderately good, drinks moderately, eats moderately and is moderately virtuous. A man is made apparently for alternate virtue and vice, and this alternation suits his health better than strict adherence to either. That theory has been threshed out in a novel called *The Woman Who Did Not*. I would advise you to read it (*AL* 58)

Like other New Woman writers, such as Sarah Grand, Cross explicitly identifies the aims of her fiction with medical edicts on sexual health, although with a different ideological inflection. The price of Gerald's purity is Anna's consummation of marriage to another man, and more importantly, to an "improper" object. His failure to propose turns the aroused girl toward more illicit and dangerous forms of sexuality. On learning about her marriage to Gaida he wonders, "[w]as I not partially responsible? Had I not helped, by awakening her dawning emotions and then leaving them unsatisfied, to precipitate her into this?", and considers it a

“morbid growth”, which was “a result partly of the awakened and ungratified impulses of that love I had stirred” (*AL* 145).

His discourse of moderation is coextensive with Cross’s treatment of female (hetero)sexuality. Her New Woman is not entirely a sexually autonomous figure who chooses to have sexual relations, but she is in the grip of some unholy and savage power of Nature. Anna is at the mercy of her lover, yet also at the mercy of her own sexual drives and instinct: “[s]he was but the innocent will-less plaything of some of those extraordinary forces that govern and sport with humanity that push it and pull it hither and thither” (*AL* 211), but this undoubtedly, at moments, gives rise to a depiction of a strong female sexual desire which so many feminists sought to deny existed in woman. I am thinking of moments such as when Anna suggests that she has sex with Gerald whilst still married to Gaida.⁸⁵ By displacing Anna’s sexual desires onto forces outside of herself Cross presents a femininity which is essentially responsive and passive, disclaiming responsibility for itself in a way which mimics masculinist paradigms of male sexuality.

Identification of Anna with a powerful but decadent femininity of an earlier age is hinted at early on in the text. His first impressions on hearing Anna Lombard’s name lead Gerald to associate her with the middle-ages.⁸⁶ In his reading of medieval history at the station, Gerald comes across a study of Catherine Sforza a notorious fifteenth century noblewoman of the Medici family who was a poisoner, and fantasises about seeing Anna dressed up to resemble her. The only way, Gerald reasons, that he could request this of her and have all the necessary costumes and props, is to organise and finance a Masquerade. The entertainment will be presented as a legitimate activity for the bored, frivolous and vain wives at the station but enables him to indulge his transgressive longing. Gerald recreates the scene of a laboratory by

ordering the necessary props of laboratory equipment of a fifteenth-century date to form the tableau.

The laboratory setting is important; whilst poison is not actually used in the murder which Anna will commit, its significance as a trope for contamination resonates with Anna's association with impurity. As a poisoner, the image also resembles the *Westminster Review*'s chloroforming, monstrous mother figure, the "Free Woman, who keeps her phial of deadly mixture in readiness, cannot be wholly dispensed from nursing, at least by deputy".⁸⁷ What is most significant about the disguise for Gerald is not the physical resemblance between the women (Anna has to don a red wig) but how he sees and eroticises Anna in Sforza's character as a murderess. The masquerade as a murderess prefigures her act of infanticide, establishing an ideological frame for the reader with which to interpret Anna's action and which elevates her into a *femme fatale* and mythical, even heroic figure:

[h]er eyes [...] burning full of light, and a strange mystic fire, a curious smile curled her lips slightly, a smile of elation, a triumph in her success and yet half tender, as if she were moved with pity and regret for what she has done [...] To me, it showed a perfect conception of the character and I sat wrapped in an intense satisfaction, feeding my fancy, carried back absolutely to the Middle Ages, seeing her at last as it seemed to me in her true form and guise [...] I sat and steeped my eyes in the sight of her – my realised dream standing in front of me (*AL* 110).

There was contemporary interest in this historical figure and other medieval women; Cross may have been familiar, for example, with Count Pasolini's recent history *Catherine Sforza* (1898)⁸⁸ which dealt sympathetically with this powerful female figure. The identification

made between a modern woman and a *femme fatale* of the Renaissance and the Middle-Ages was also significant in Vernon Lee's writing, such as in the short story 'Medea' discussed in chapter 3. The Middle-Ages are used by Cross to explore and historicise female sexuality, too, as a time "when women loved as men, as strongly, and often as briefly" (*AL* 156).

Discussing the prominence of the figure of the *femme fatale* in turn-of-the-century literature, Rebecca Stott writes that she "expresses a plethora of anxieties at once, or rather she is a sign, a figure who crosses discourse boundaries, who is to be found at the intersection of Western racial, sexual and imperial anxieties".⁸⁹ Cross's representation of the *femme fatale* is at such a cultural crossroads; but Anna unlike many *femme fatales* of male-authored late Victorian fiction, is not a symptom of degeneracy. Her Otherness is a violent break from traditional femininities; configured as a modern, imperial sexuality it is celebrated.

This episode, and the culminating masquerade tableau most intensely focus and express Gerald's sexual feeling for Anna. He sees her as "wonderfully strong" with "something large, larger than the nature of most women, something also extremely courageous, that called for an heroic age to find its natural exercise" (*AL* 99). A discourse of the heroism of empire is evoked here, but for women the heroism and adventure of empire are transposed to the domestic. The identification he makes between Anna and Catherine are each as historically criminal figures; he says of Sforza, "[h]er crimes were the crimes of the century" (*AL* 105). Anna's crime is a peculiarly fin-de-siècle one because it supports the primacy of married love between two white British colonials and seeks to eliminate the miscegenation with native Indian. We are to understand her actions as amongst "great and heroic deeds" because they restore, and reward, the love of her white husband.

Anna's fair-haired beauty is conventional for a Victorian or Edwardian heroine, but her bloneness and whiteness become a strategic signifier for racial purity as the novel

concludes. Her beauty becomes synonymous with her purity; both are signified by whiteness (her favourite flower is a white rose; she always wears white dresses). Her beauty is racialised; her cheeks are “like the wild rose in the English hedgerow first opening after a summer shower”(AL 14). Whiteness becomes aestheticised as racial purity; when Anna holds her baby, Gerald describes it as “hideous with that curious hideousness of aspect that belongs usually to the fruit of Eurasian marriages. As it lay on Anna’s arm now, the peculiar whiteness of her skin threw up its dusky tint” (AL 291). Beauty is localised in skin colour and difference is fetishised and made a monstrosity.

Maternal instinct is rebellious here, disobedient to the husband, who is isolated by its intensity. For New Woman writers Ann Heilmann argues “male controlled and socially imposed motherhood is always the marker of female subjection and self alienation”,⁹⁰ and in this case the heroine can only regain control by rejecting motherhood. However in *Anna Lombard*, the distinctions between, and definitions of, socially imposed and male controlled motherhood break down. The supreme act of love the narrative claims, which breaks the laws of Nature, is for Anna to kill her baby and “erase” the betrayal of colonial hegemony it represents, apparent in its “dusky form”.

Racial difference becomes the whole of the baby’s identity, with its “darkness” over-emphasised; he is a “small, dark object”(AL 291), the “small dark mouth drew life from her breast”(AL 293): its “blackness” signifies complete otherness to the reader. The narrator’s descriptions throw up conflicting positions; it “passes” as white yet it is made to represent the abject: it was “hideous, horrible in its suggestion of mixed blood”(AL 293). Gerald states that their white neighbours remark on its likeness to him. The baby had “lost a little of its first repulsiveness and to no eyes but those that knew the secret of its birth would it have seemed different from a European’s. I myself being so dark, the child was supposed to ‘favour me’

and ‘resemble me’”(AL 295). That it is not named is a narrative strategy to minimise the human identity of the baby and thus compassion for it. Cross significantly frames Anna’s decision to kill the baby when it is a couple of months, not days, old, making it a conscious act with specific motives not one of postnatal depression, the nature of which had been recognised by the judiciary since the 1860s; the *Nineteenth Century* reported that the 1876 bill for the punishment of infanticide split the murder by two degrees, and specified a period of up to seven days after birth for second degree murder, punishable by penal servitude.⁹¹

The end of the novel brings together Anna’s New Womanly attributes with the project of imperialism. She assists Gerald in preparing some documents for his colonial administrative duties, a task which she performs excellently, and from then on she acts as secretary to Gerald in his office even while she is pregnant. This blending of the public with the private space in Anna’s life and roles and the ends to which these are put – particularly poignantly through her fluency in spoken and written Hindustani – illustrates her serving the Empire, the strengthening of her ties with imperial ideology, and her repudiation of cross-cultural romance.

The New Woman here has a place in the public sphere through her “mental” labour – her administrative work for her husband’s post at the station – and through her maternal body, which also serves the empire. Yet Cross is not uncritical in her treatment of colonial government and society; her attention to the boundaries of identity eroticise and attach illicit danger to these crossings, but also compassion and sympathy. Knapp finds that the depiction of love in Cross’s fiction is one “transcending boundaries of race, religion, culture and legal sanction”.⁹² Yet those border crossings which recur in Cross’s fiction between sex, gender, race, colonial and class, generate anxieties not only for the reader, but for the author, who seeks to contain what she has suggested.

I have argued for a re-examination of Cross's credentials as a social purity feminist; the notion of evading oppositions and binaries is one which Cross appears to sanction in her pleas for moderation. She challenges "purity" and "impurity" in relation to an individual's integrity. Cross clearly delineates a New Woman heroine in Anna Lombard, giving her qualities which explore femininity in more depth and with a more searching quality than the ideological outcomes she appears to serve. In doing this she creates a figure who, in common with what Ann Heilmann has identified as a tendency of protagonists in anti-New Woman novels, has an energy which exceeds the boundaries of femininity by which she is ultimately circumscribed in this novel.⁹³

The infanticidal woman remains a key symbol in the creating and policing of borders of barbarity and civilisation; in reinforcing the values of imperialism, for Cross, Anna Lombard's infanticide is a measure of her civilised modernity. The heroic infanticidal mother, killing her baby out of compassion to save it from a lifetime of misery, poverty or vice is a familiar figure to the nineteenth century, but the construction of Anna's infanticide as heroic does not fit this conception. Her violent act is a rejection of the "natural laws" of motherhood and mother-love, which can be read as a New Womanish act, but if, as McDonagh suggests of the Victorian period, "motherhood had come to symbolize civilization itself, and infanticide represents its boundaries",⁹⁴ her act of child murder determines what kind of woman she wants to be in order to secure civilisation.

Empire is a crucial context to exploring the relationship of maternity to female sexuality in turn of the century women's writing; the colonial figures as a quintessentially modern aspect of female identity, an ideological frame of a new cultural frontier hinting at independence and adventure, with which to revise the terms of female participation in citizenship. In Iota's *A Comedy in Spasms*, colonial identity is constructed to criticise the stale

and outmoded Victorian conventions for passive feminine behaviour. Invigorated by her displacement in the New World, the Antipodean girl's laudable, sexually selective instincts for maternity are thwarted; the novel bemoans the opportunities for eugenic mating lost to middle-class girls through the corrupt rules of the Victorian marriage market. For Iota, acting in accordance with their natural, sexual-maternal instincts, women have an innate purity which would advance society toward a truly civilised state. In contrast, Cross's New Woman is the unnatural woman – the decadent figure of Sforza – reviled by Victorian conservatism. For Cross, the New Woman's strength will lie in her *unnaturalness*: only in breaking away from her subordination to natural laws and instincts and rejecting the tyranny of her biology will she be able to contribute to civilisation. Maternal instinct is treated as a natural quality which must be successfully manipulated by cultural imperatives, including women's aspiration to (colonial) citizenship on a basis of equality with men.

My reading of Victorian feminism in this chapter demands that in recovering the work of neglected women writers under the rubric of the New Woman, we continue to acknowledge and interrogate the complicity of white Western feminists in racist, imperialist ideology, to question the workings and value of the "civilising process" of "imperial feminism" and the racism which underpinned so much of its privileged concepts of modernity.

¹ Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso 1992): 160.

² Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997): 67.

³ Nancy L. Paxton, *Writing Under the Raj: Gender, Race and Rape in the British Colonial Imagination 1830-1947* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1999): 197.

⁴ See Alfred Russel Wallace, *Studies Scientific and Social Vols. 1 and 2* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1900).

⁵ Carolyn Burdett, 'The Hidden Romance of Sexual Science: Eugenics, the Nation and the Making of Modern Feminism' in Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (eds) *Sexology in Culture: Labelling Bodies and Desires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁶ For further discussion see Anna Davin's excellent examination of the formation of an ideology of motherhood in imperialist and nationalist interests at the start of the twentieth century, which was implemented in the "schools for mothers" and "mothercraft" movements. Anna Davin, 'Imperialism and Motherhood', *History Workshop* 5 (1978): 9-65.

⁷ Frances Swiney, *The Awakening of Women. Or, Women's Past in Evolution* (1899; London: William Reeves, 1908): 121

⁸ Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995): 97.

⁹ Frances Swiney, *The Awakening of Women* (1908): 121.

¹⁰ Ibid: 121.

¹¹ John Sutherland, *Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (Harlow: Longman, 1990).

¹² Hugh E. M. Stutfield, 'Tommyrotics', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 157 (1895): 833-845.

However one reviewer in 'Two "New" Women' questioned Iota's newness, putting the new in inverted commas, suggesting that "this New Woman differs from the old fashioned woman in nothing but the absence of all regard for the feelings and comfort of others". *Critic* (26 May 1894): 354.

¹³ For example, John Sutherland (1990), and Carolyn Christensen Nelson, *British Women Fiction Writers of the 1890's* (London: Twayne, 1996).

¹⁴ The edition I refer to is *The Yellow Aster* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1894).

¹⁵ *Shafts* (8 March 1894): 153-154.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid: 153.

¹⁸ Ibid: 153.

¹⁹ Ibid: 153.

²⁰ The edition I refer to is *A Comedy in Spasms* (London: Hutchinson & Co. 1895)

²¹ The colonial context of the frontier, as Kate Darian-Smith has noted, was an experience which became paradigmatic for the Australian colonial. The frontier became coded as a wild place perceived as sexually threatening to white womanhood by both the outlaw sensibility of white male settlers and abduction by aboriginal men. ' "Rescuing" Barbara Thompson and other white women: captivity narratives on Australian frontiers', *Text, Theory, Space*. Eds. Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall (London: Routledge, 1996): 99-114. The narrative of *A Comedy in Spasms* moves Elizabeth to the safety of "home".

²² Annie E. Holdsworth wrote many novels, amongst others *The Years That the Locust Hath Eaten* (1896) and *Joanna Traill, Spinster* (1894).

²³ Annie E. Holdsworth, 'A Book of the Hour', *Woman's Signal* (29 Aug. 1895): 69.

²⁴ Ibid: 69.

²⁵ 'The Antipodean Girl', *Shafts* (7 Jan 1893): 153.

²⁶ Ibid: 153.

²⁷ Ibid: 153.

²⁸ Ibid: 153.

²⁹ For further discussion of Victorian women and travel, see Simon Gikandi, *Maps Of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1996).

³⁰ Margaret Macmillan describes how women who emigrated to India during the nineteenth-century were cynically known as the "fishing fleet" because of the high number of engagements said to be made on board. The numbers of British women proportionate to British men stationed were so few, and both sexes sought to secure a partner. See Margaret Macmillan, *Women of the Raj* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988). As a passenger remarks of the men on board: "Heaven knows it wants a good deal to put them off a woman in the course of a long sea voyage. If a female creature can't manage to extract her meed of admiration and attention on board a P. and O. steamer, she must be in a bad way" (CS 112).

³¹ Kerry Goldsworthy, 'The voyage south: writing immigration', *Text, Theory, Space*. Eds. Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall (1996): 53-63.

³² Annie E. Holdsworth, *WS* (29 Aug 1895): 69.

³³ Shoshana Milgram Knapp, 'Revolutionary Androgyny in the fiction of "Victoria Cross"' *Seeing Double: Revisioning Modernist and Edwardian Literature*. Eds. Carola M. Kaplan and Anne B. Simpson (New York: St Martins Press, 1996): 8.

³⁴ Barbara Arnett Melchiori, *Grant Allen: The Downward Path Which Leads to Fiction* (Rome: Bulzoni Editore, 2000): 193.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ The edition to which I refer is Victoria Crosse, *The Woman Who Didn't* (London: John Lane, 1895; (June 1999). <http://www.indiana.edu/~letrs/vwwp/cross/womanwho.html>.

³⁷ Ovid (43 BC-AD 17) in *Metamorphoses* describes Orpheus's wife, Eurydice, as succumbing to a serpent's bite then passively accepting her second death caused by her husband's disobedience to the gods of Erebus. Cross's Eurydice is also ultimately passive to her fate of an unhappy marriage.

³⁸ The greater proximity the boat affords to natural surroundings are made to correlate with desire; an extensive description of the sunrise over the sea is rendered in terms of their imagined sexual union: "[s]mooth, almost motionless, the sea lay, yet swelling, palpitating gently, trembling and blushing under the caresses of the Dawn" (*TWWD* 49).

³⁹ Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik discuss how freedom from the boundaries of discourse and culture are explored metaphorically through landscapes such as the sea in women's writing. Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, *Landscapes of Desire: Metaphors in Modern Women's Fiction* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990).

⁴⁰ George Robb, 'Race Motherhood: Moral Eugenics vs Progressive Eugenics 1880-1920' *Maternal Instincts: Vision of Motherhood and Sexuality in Britain 1875-1925*. Eds. Claudia Nelson and Ann Sumner Holmes (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998): 59-74 (70).

⁴¹ Ibid: 72.

⁴² Ibid: 59.

⁴³ Victoria Cross, 'Theodora: A Fragment' (1895) in Elaine Showalter (ed.) *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 1993): 20.

⁴⁴ Jill L. Matus gives a valuable discussion of infanticide and the discourse of maternal instinct in the mid-century in *Unstable Bodies: Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

⁴⁵ 'A Crime and its Causes', *Westminster Review* 151 (Feb. 1899): 131-134.

⁴⁶ Ibid: 136.

⁴⁷ 'A Crime and its Causes', *Westminster Review* (1899): 136.

- ⁴⁸ Lionel Rose mentions this law in relation to the Poor Law Royal Commissioners Report of 1834. Lionel Rose, *The Massacre of the Innocents. Infanticide in Britain 1800-1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986): 25.
- ⁴⁹ 'A Crime and its Causes', *Westminster Review* (1899): 138.
- ⁵⁰ Lionel Rose, *The Massacre of the Innocents* (1986):170.
- ⁵¹ Op. cit: 138.
- ⁵² Ibid: 138.
- ⁵³ Lionel Rose, *The Massacre of the Innocents* (1986): 171.
- ⁵⁴ Jill L. Matus, *Unstable Bodies* (1995): 157.
- ⁵⁵ Josephine McDonagh, 'Infanticide and the Boundaries of Culture from Hume to Arnold', *Inventing Maternity: Politics, Science, and Literature 1650-1865*. Eds. Carol Barash and Susan Greenfield (Kentucky: Kentucky University Press, 1999): 217.
- ⁵⁶ The reification of borders of barbarity and civilisation is also suggested by H. L. Malchow's findings on the connection made between female cannibalism and infanticide in discourses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where infanticide figures as normative racial characteristic amongst non-Western peoples. H.L.Malchow, *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).
- ⁵⁷ Sarah Grand, *The Beth Book* (1897; Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994): 45.
- ⁵⁸ The colonial administration passed the Female Infanticide Act in 1870. Unsigned, 'Infanticide in India', *Chambers Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Art* (13 Aug.1892): 517-519.
- ⁵⁹ Josephine McDonagh cites Joan Manheimer's reading of the novel's ending, finding that Hetty, as a sexually liberated woman, represents modernity; I agree that modernity and sexual liberation were being linked in cultural representation, however I suggest that she is hardly a liberated figure.
- ⁶⁰ Jill L.Matus, *Unstable Bodies* (1995): 174.
- ⁶¹ George Egerton, 'Wedlock', *Discords* (London: John Lane, 1894): 120.
- ⁶² Sally Ledger compares Egerton's story with *Jude the Obscure* and finds Egerton's method in deploying dreams "makes possible a startling degree of psychological compression and allows an exploration of the woman's consciousness which Thomas Hardy, using the well-worn form of the realist novel was unable to achieve." Sally Ledger, *The New Woman*: 190. Ledger suggests that the murders are "a phantasmagoric eruption in what is purporting to be a realist novel, and it is as if this disturbing, strange episode is born of an inability otherwise to give utterance to the ineluctable imbrication of female sexuality and reproduction": 185.
- ⁶³ Stutfield reported that "a cry of revolt recently sounded in an American magazine by Lady Henry Somerset concerning 'the unwelcome child'. [...] [A] very new woman [...] has suggested a highly effective method of dealing with the intrusive little stranger – chloroform. Let us hope, however, that this lady is somewhat in advance even of the 'intellectual movement' of the end of the nineteenth-century". Hugh Stutfield, 'Tommyrotics', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 157 (1895): 833-45. Reproduced in Ann Heilmann (ed.) *The Late Victorian Marriage Question Vol. 5: 'Literary Degenerates'* (London: Routledge, 1999).
- ⁶⁴ Irma von Troll-Borostyani, *Die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter* (Zürich, 1888).
- ⁶⁵ 'The Strike of a Sex', *Westminster Review* 178 (1894): 311.
- ⁶⁶ Robert J. C. Young cites Charles Brooke, who in *Ten Years in Sarawak* (1866 argued that mixing Asian blood with their own, the British would become acclimatised to India and thus become more efficient colonisers. Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire* (1995): 143.
- ⁶⁷ Sir George Campbell, *The British Empire* (London: Cassell and Co. Ltd, 1887): 7.

- ⁶⁸ Paxton cites that in "1901 for example, [the British] numbered approximately 170,000 in a total Indian population of 294,000,000 and Eurasian population of 89,000". Nancy L. Paxton, *Writing Under the Raj: Gender, Race and Rape in the British Colonial Imagination* (London: Rutgers University Press, 1999): 193.
- ⁶⁹ Margaret Macmillan, *Women of the Raj*: 125.
- ⁷⁰ Phillipa Levine, 'Rereading the 1890s Venereal Disease as Constitutional Crisis in Britain and British India' *Journal of Asian Studies* 55 (3 Aug 1996): 585-612 (589).
- ⁷¹ Nancy L. Paxton, *Writing Under the Raj* (1999):193.
- ⁷² *Academy* (4 May 1901): 385.
- ⁷³ Victoria Cross, *Anna Lombard* (1901; London: John Long, 1902): Preface.
- ⁷⁴ *Academy* (6 April 1901): 306.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ⁷⁶ W. T. Stead, ' "Anna Lombard": A Novel of the Ethics of Sex', *Review of Reviews* 23 (1901): 597.
- ⁷⁷ Shoshana Milgram Knapp, 'Revolutionary Androgyny in the Fiction of "Victoria Cross"', *'Seeing Double'*. Eds. Carola M. Kaplan and Anne B. Simpson (1996): 11.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid: 17.
- ⁷⁹ Milgram Knapp, 'Revolutionary Androgyny in the fiction of "Victoria Cross"' (1996): 10.
- ⁸⁰ See Melisa Brittain, 'Erasing Race in the New Woman Review: Victoria Cross's *Anna Lombard*', *Nineteenth Century Feminisms* no.4 (Spring/Summer 2001): 75-95.
- ⁸¹ Ibid.
- ⁸² Ibid :14.
- ⁸³ W.T. Stead, 'Anna Lombard: A Novel of the Ethics of Sex', *Review of Reviews* 23 (1901): 597.
- ⁸⁴ Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992): 77.
- ⁸⁵ Whilst Anna wishes to consummate her relationship with Gerald, she expresses a desire to continue to have sexual relations with Gaida: "[o]h, Gerald, take me too in that way. Let us marry, then nothing could touch or break the love I have for you [...] Let me keep him too, for a little while – at first" (*AL* 135).
- ⁸⁶ Gerald remarks, "Anna Lombard [...] a curious name; it sounds somehow to me medieval, a middle-age sort of name" (*AL* 12).
- ⁸⁷ 'The Strike of a Sex', *Westminster Review* 178-9 (1894): 311.
- ⁸⁸ Count Pier Desiderio Pasolini, *Catherine Sforza* (London: William Heinemann, 1898).
- ⁸⁹ Rebecca Stott, *The Late-Victorian Femme Fatale: The Kiss of Death* (London: Macmillan, 1992): 30.
- ⁹⁰ Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First Wave Feminism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000):144.
- ⁹¹ C. A. Fyffe, 'The Punishment of Infanticide', *Nineteenth Century* 1 (June 1877): 583.
- ⁹² Shoshana Milgram Knapp, 'Revolutionary Androgyny in the fiction of "Victoria Cross"' (1996): 17.
- ⁹³ See Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction* (2000): 25.
- ⁹⁴ Josephine McDonagh, 'Infanticide and the Boundaries of Culture from Hume to Arnold' (1999): 225.

Chapter 6

The child and the “genius”: Sarah Grand’s *The Beth Book* and Alice Meynell’s *The Children*.

Post-Darwinian science was heralded as vital knowledge for understanding the self in late-Victorian culture. Situated amongst competing discourses of heredity and eugenics, the discourse of the child occupied a new and popular area of investigation and interpretation in the light of evolutionism. The popularisation of biology and medicine in the periodical press during the second half of the nineteenth century claimed a growing and mixed readership, including women. Such an informed middle-class readership bring this reading to bear on other texts. In fiction, for example, discoveries in hereditarian identity with their implications for free will, and the effect of nature and nurture, played a new and important role in understanding the development of the individual.¹ These developments had particular significance for women writers in the literary market, who by participating in the fin de siècle interest in deploying evolutionary discourses for transfiguring narrative, stood to gain cultural currency. Yet their knowledge and interpretations of medical and biological ideas were frequently derided for being “unwomanly”.²

This chapter will give a brief history of child psychology and the dominant theories which prevailed at the turn of the century in order to situate discussion of the social and psychological aspects of Alice Meynell’s treatment of childhood, writing as a mother. Sarah Grand’s autobiographical novel *The Beth Book: Being a Study from the Life of Elizabeth Caldwell Maclure, A Woman of Genius* (1897) draws on expanding interest in the psychology of childhood and new hereditarian paradigms in narrating the progress of its female

protagonist, Beth. This chapter will consider these theoretical developments and demonstrate how in literary and scientific discourses within the context of a shared cultural register of evolutionism, the child and the “genius” were interlinked in the light of concerns about cultural and national progress at the fin de siècle.

Interest in the child and its study expanded during the last part of the nineteenth century, which saw a burgeoning of a market for children’s literature and magazines, journals and books on childcare. The beginning of the twentieth century saw the opening of “mothercraft centres” in Britain and the growth of the process of enlisting mothers in monitoring their infant’s progress within State institutions, under the aegis of G. Stanley Hall in America.³ Whilst child psychology arising from the treatment of pedagogical problems had existed since the middle of the eighteenth century, it saw its most influential, Darwinian, theoretical development in the work of William Preyer (1842-97) in Germany during the 1860-90s.⁴ His empirical study into the intellectual development of children was undertaken by physiologically trained researchers by a process which necessitated the withholding of all training and instruction in the child’s first years with the aim of identifying their innate and acquired characteristics: “the hereditary dispositions and the traces of the experiences and activities of his forefathers”.⁵ The defects of the child would be reformed through education, and thus hereditary advantages would be increased.⁶

In ‘A Biographical Sketch of an Infant’ published in *Mind* in 1877, Charles Darwin offered the reading public observations of his first son’s, William Erasmus’ development as a baby some thirty-seven years earlier. He considers the origins of emotional expression by comparing the baby’s development in those faculties and their resemblance to the higher primates and other animals, distinguishing between instinctual and learnt behaviours, as he had in *Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) and *Expression of the*

Emotions in Man and Animals (1872). Many scientists followed with similar studies.⁷ Louis Robinson in his 'Darwinism in the Nursery' (1891) went about, somewhat belatedly, demonstrating through less than tender experiments on new-born babies (measuring the power of their hand grip whilst suspended from a stick),⁸ a Darwinian thesis of how we are "descended from an arboreal quadrumanous ancestor".⁹ He suggested that parents were not the best scientific investigators of their own children, although the illustrious exception of Darwin, a male parent, suggests that Robinson found maternity rather than parenthood the most significant obstacle. The subjective position of the mother in this analogy, imputes to her a "primitive" ignorance of her own identity and practices: "the average mother, in spite of many unquestioned merits, is about as competent to take an unprejudiced view of the facts bearing on the natural history of her infant as a West African negro would do to carry out an investigation of the anatomy and physiology of a fetish."¹⁰ The mother is discounted by Robinson as so intimately immersed in the life of her baby as if under as powerful an influence as the native of West Africa to their cultural superstitions, thus underlining a shared non-rational subjectivity between the white woman and the black African.

Psychological study of children had interest for eugenicists. Colleagues at the University of Central London, the psychologist James Sully (1842-1923), Francis Galton (1822-1911) and Karl Pearson established a Laboratory of Experimental Psychology of which Sully was the secretary at the beginning of 1898. The work of the laboratory explicitly aimed at producing data for eugenics from psychological studies, particularly upon children. The aims of this experimental psychology were measuring with tests in order:

to ascertain inherent defects in the mental constitution of children and adults with more precision than is possible by unaided observation; and it may be hoped that these

investigations will lead to the establishment of such rational modes of separate treatment of persons who are mentally defective, as may conduce, in an important degree, to the good of the community.¹¹

A letter from Galton to Sully indicates the extent to which this practice of child psychology was recognised in the scientific community. Galton, who remained childless all his life, had to depend on others' children for developing his theories in anthropometric psychology; on the 25th March 1880, he wrote to Sully: "[m]y dear sir, I have of late been envious of those who have children, and opportunities of psychologically dissecting them. Thank you much for what you tell me about yours."¹² Sully's interest in the application of psychology for eugenic research, evident in his correspondence with Galton, is not apparent in his published work; Sully, amongst others, supplied Galton with details of testing of his young daughter's behaviour and answers on a range of mental imaging tasks.

Sully offered a father's observations of his baby son's growth in an essay 'Babies and Science'¹³ which outlined and promoted the early efforts of child psychology and the educative value of science through involvement of the father as amateur researcher, to the readers of the family-oriented *Cornhill* magazine. He restates the Darwinian thesis which attributes the development of altruism and sociality in our evolution to the human infant whose long period of vulnerability would foster and promote feelings of compassion in its carer: "[h]ad there been no babies there would have been no higher intellectual development, no sacred ties of kinship, friendship, and co-patriotism"('BS' 543) However, he claims that it was women who, because of their proximity to the child in maternity, benefited most from advances in sensibility. An empirical science – the domestic activity of observing one's offspring – makes of the male parent a lay practitioner, transforming the subject, baby, into

scientific object. The moral implications of this knowledge he claims, will be enlightening for human development:

[w]hatever the scientific worth of the results so far obtained, nobody but a cynical contemner of all human tenderness will doubt the ethical importance of an occupation which is so well fitted to soften the sex which nature has not taken the same pains to mollify that we have seen her take in the case of the other half of the race ('BS' 554).

The insights into, and intimacy with the baby, gained by ostensibly scientific methods will modify male behaviour, by training what he calls the "dull male eye" into ways of seeing which are already natural and instinctual to the mother.

Despite his exclusion of female parents from qualifying as scientific practitioners (their subjective interests being deemed to interfere with the objectivity required by science), Sully's argument can be identified with the popular feminist discourse of female evolutionary superiority. For many feminist and other social reformers, the action of sexual selection, the accumulation of skills in discerning the fittest males, and the intimacy enjoyed with children evinced by their maternal role, signified women's moral and emotional superiority to men. Sully suggests that child science, by recognising babyhood as "a necessary link in the chain of cosmic events"('BS' 543) has given women a victory "like that of our Saxon forefathers over their pagan foes"('BS' 543), an analogy which suggests a considerable degree of cultural power. His discourse of rights figures science as part of a social and sexual democratisation in which child psychology will act as an evolutionary leveller, bringing men up to the moral level of women and leaving women satisfied that the significance of babyhood has been recognised. He enthuses: "science has become a champion of the neglected rights of infancy;

it has taken a whole period of human life under its special protection. And in doing this it has constituted itself the avenger of a whole sex”(‘BS’ 540). Of course his presentation of science as an intervention precipitating a new masculinity and sympathy between the sexes, elides the way in which the somatic determinism of professional discourses of science and medicine largely produced negative and inequitable constructs of woman which naturalised their subordination and endorsed an ideology of separate spheres. The model of a “reverse discourse”¹⁴ in which evolutionary discourses are appropriated to argue the superiority of women and the necessity of their agency is part of the strategic use of science which Grand makes in her novel *The Beth Book*. As we shall see, Grand’s engagement with science is thus precarious, courting its authority and privileging its epistemological status, but negotiating its values.

Sully sees women as unable to act properly as scientific observer; she is largely disqualified from carrying out objective inquiry by her maternal instincts. As with Preyer’s desired methods of objectivity, the law of non-intervention and instruction would be violated by a mother’s solitudes. Typical of the new study of the child, a series in the journal *Knowledge* addressed the educational needs of the infant as those which would be illuminated by the scientific facts of its nature and mental processes, announcing that “it is time that the different facts of infant mental life should be carefully systematised and placed within the reach of the mothers of England”.¹⁵ By the end of the century mothers were being enlisted to study their child’s growth in the interest of eugenic progress.

Despite the more recent shifts in theories of heredity,¹⁶ evolutionary psychologists continued to derive their interpretations from earlier paradigms.¹⁷ In 1866 the morphologist Ernst Haeckel formulated the biogenetic law that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny; the individual embryo repeats the ancestral adult stages of development in its growth.¹⁸ Conjoined

with the persisting legacy of J. B. Lamarck's theory earlier in the century, which posited the inheritability of acquired characters, this illustration of the theory of common descent was to have an important application in the scientising of the child. According to the influential work of the American evolutionary psychologists

G. Stanley Hall and Alexander Chamberlain, children displayed a post-natal recapitulation of phylogenetic individual growth in the history of the race, passing through various stages of cultural and racial evolution in the transition into adulthood. Sully introduced this theory into his *Studies of Childhood* (1895):

[w]hile a monument of this race, and in a manner a key to its history, the child is also its product. In spite of the fashionable Weismannism of the hour, there are evolutionists who hold that in the early manifested tendencies of the child we can discern signs of a hereditary transmission of the effects of ancestral experiences and activities.¹⁹

The proximity which children shared with earlier, "primitive" cultures and races, could be deduced from their so-called "psychic atavisms", which covered a vast range of behaviours all deemed to stem from the rich yields of ancestral recapitulation in a process characterised by Chamberlain as "the sudden return in individuals of the higher races of man of psychic characteristics which properly belong to the savage, anthropomorphic or animal ancestors".²⁰

In *Studies of Childhood*, the psychologist's methodology favours literary accounts and short anecdotal tales over the statistical methods pioneered by scientists such as Francis Galton and Karl Pearson.²¹ As well as citing Frances Hodgson Burnett's autobiography *The One I knew the Best Of All* (1893), Sully analyses the autobiographical account of the childhood of writer and female "genius" George Sand (Amandine-Aurore-Lucie Dupin) for its

evidence of paleopsychic tendencies in girlhood. He reads Aurore's fascination with the echo and with her reflection through E. B. Tylor's theory of the double as a trope of "uncivilised man" – a figure which reflects the development in the early thought of the race of "the animistic conception that everything has a double nature and existence".²² He describes her acts of worship with small sacrifices and shrines in her own childish religion to a God which she named Corambé. The child displays different aspects of religious impulse for Sully according to gender; associating masculinity with higher philosophical thought – his example is Goethe – males represent the speculative, and females, as with Aurore, the humanitarian element.

Sully admires the colonial feminist writer Olive Schreiner's novel *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) and highlights an early passage in which the small boy Waldo is praying to God the father and offers up the lamb chop meant for his dinner. He praises Schreiner's characterisation of Waldo, suggesting that "kneeling bareheaded in the blazing sun and offering his dinner on an altar to God, may look exaggerated to some; but to us essentially true to some of the deepest instincts of childhood".²³ In his argument Sully drew on anthropological evidence of an evolutionary hierarchy which enabled him in "tracing of an affinity between the ideas and impulses of the child and those of backward races. In working out the analogies between them, I found it necessary to look more closely into ethnological records of the mental peculiarities of savage peoples."²⁴ The landscape of the *veldt* and the *kopje* of *African Farm* is interpreted as supporting a "savage" or atavistic scene of worship with sacrifices. Thus for him the scene illustrated the relation between the child mind and the "primitive", in which the child's fears and doubts of a confusing and contradictory adult faith are expressed in the superstitious efforts to appease a God.

Carolyn Burdett in her recent discussion of the novel finds that “[i]n enacting the Biblical literalism he has been raised on (he sacrifices the mutton chop which was to have been his dinner on an altar of stones), Waldo is not so much striving to propitiate God as to lure back his own fragmenting faith”.²⁵ Burdett grounds the portrayal of childhood in the opening scenes of *African Farm* within a literary tradition which endured throughout the nineteenth century in which the impact of evangelical Christianity is portrayed as terrorising the innocent child, “creating for the unhappy child a tormented sense of sin and unworthiness and the agonies of an inadequate faith,”²⁶ – experiences which would be subtly examined in Edmund Gosse’s autobiography *Father and Son* (1907). Waldo is a modern child in discovering inadequacy in religious explanations of God, human nature and Nature. The child’s interrogation of his world registers the shift toward an intellectual reform of faith shared by the contemporary reader of the 1880s.

The Calvinist beliefs in original sin had been revived and popularised by the evangelical Methodism of John Wesley. For the evangelical Christian, the child was an individual conceived in sin, who must henceforth be disciplined with punishment and be obedient to parental authority. The competing religious and cultural paradigms of original sin and the original innocence in the nature of the child countered by Rousseau and the Romantic movement in the eighteenth century continued to be debated throughout the nineteenth century, and can be seen to have informed emergent secular, scientific or anthropological studies. For psychologists Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, there was a “moral insanity” peculiar to the child, who was “naturally, by his organisation, nearer to the animal, to the savage, to the criminal, than the adult”.²⁷ This evolutionary kinship meant that in his atavistic behaviour the criminal was likewise considered “a child of larger growth”.²⁸ This model of the innate depravity of the child to which Ellis refers seems to have echoes of Calvinist

beliefs; the more enlightened views represented by Chamberlain, Sully and others at the end of the century, by contrast, continued to draw upon the Romantic belief in innocence.

A poet, essayist and journalist publishing at the height of the New Woman debate during the 1890s, Alice Meynell was far from being identified as a New Woman, yet her work displays an interest in gender issues and cultural politics shared with the New Woman. Meynell's personal and public convictions express strong feminist views;²⁹ she was politically active in the suffrage movement later in life, but the style she cultivated shunned the upfront, declamatory statements of many on the woman question; thus Talia Schaffer identifies her as a "paradigmatic female aesthete [...], passionately concerned with women's changing roles and worried about [her] own public status regarding this movement".³⁰ Critics have recently emphasised Meynell's modernity and "transcendence of context"³¹ rather than her angelic, even saccharine Victorian-ness in which her achievements are seen as limited to the locality of late-Victorian women's poetry. Maria Frawley, for example, finds an ambiguity and anxiety in Meynell's representation of motherhood which aligns it with the tensions over gender politics associated with the emergence of modernism;³² Schaffer sees a creative achievement in the complexity of her public persona, which manipulated her martyrism as an "Angel in the House", that creation beloved of Victorian separate sphere ideology; Schaffer suggests that Meynell's career actually benefited from this iconisation.³³

Meynell's work shares characteristics with the writing of Vernon Lee, discussed in chapter 3; in particular in her deployment of Paterian techniques which convey the fragmentary nature of psychological processes in perception and memory. Her essays demonstrate the associationism which Lee had theorised and embodied in her writing; Meynell's prose forced the reader to make associations between otherwise disconnected themes, disjunctures and allusions. In *The Children* and other essays, we see the Paterian

foregrounding of the pleasures of the fleeting moment, vivid sensory experience and not only for the child, but as part of a sensibility which shifts between the adult, her memory of childhood, and her observation of the child.

The Children (1896)³⁴ is a collection which has a deliberate contemporaneity in its theme. I will discuss some of the essays from this volume and from the centenary volume *Alice Meynell: Prose and Poetry* and argue that her writing of the child self has a modernity of treatment which can be situated in relation to the emergence of the new psychology of child subjectivity. I will then turn to James Sully's criticism of *The Children* to consider the issues of cultural authority thrown up by the struggles over women, in particular mothers – Meynell was the mother of seven children³⁵ – writing “science”. Meynell's undertaking of this topic as a Victorian woman was, in writing on “dangerously sentimental subjects”, as Vita Sackville-West suggests “something of an achievement.”³⁶ With her layering of intellectual, feminist historiographic and literary treatment of the theme and her characteristic elliptic style she places herself out of reach of the charges of feminine sentimentality or cliché levelled at the woman writer.

The poet and novelist George Meredith was a friend of James Sully's; in a private letter to Sully he had praised the latter's *Studies of Childhood*:

Very seriously indeed let me say that considering the length of time you have devoted to the observation of these little ones & your devout intentness, the marvel is that you did not sink midway into the condition of the infants' mind. This is a triumph of the philosophical, and nothing else would have sustained you. I have heard praises of the book from young mothers, & I have little doubt that you have already [?] of the solid philosophical value of your patient study.³⁷

The emphasis in his remarks, whilst humorous, is on the serious philosophical nature of Sully's book, as befits comment on an undertaking by an established psychologist. However, he also finds the child in Meynell's literary enterprise to exceed those terms and reifies her writing in approaching the nature of philosophy. In a review of Meynell's recent essay collections, Meredith, who was a friend and admirer of Meynell, makes a startling reconciliation between writer and mother:

impressive reserve is noticeable whenever this writer touches on children. There is not the word of affectionateness; her knowledge and her maternal love of children are shown in her ready entry in to the childish state and transcript of its germinal ideas, the feelings of the young, – a common subject for the sentimentalising hand, from which nothing is gathered. Only deep love could furnish the intimate knowledge to expound them so.³⁸

Unusually, Meredith praises those literary qualities of remoteness and emotional distance which society finds to be unfeminine and unnatural, which are characteristic of Meynell's intellectual essays, and strangely, finds a profoundly "good" motherly feeling; "deep love", is said to be the enabling condition for such unsentimental detachment. The belief in an essential ground of maternal instinct in this woman as muse and Angel – the most common perception of her femininity amongst her contemporaries – cannot be relinquished. Meredith selects for special praise her treatment of the child's sense of historic events in the essay 'The Illusion of Historic Time', "a piece of work of more than the literary value for which it is remarkable. It is work that philosophers may read with enlivenment; instructed, perhaps."³⁹ To be maternal is to be womanly, and to be "scientific" is to be unwomanly, a contradiction which Meredith's

glowing review cannot reconcile in consistent hegemonic ideological terms. Such an identity brings the female aesthete closer to the agenda of the New Woman.

The Children is a small, “pretty” volume; its exquisite illustrations of saintly looking girls by the renowned illustrator Charles Robinson, and its wide margins which make the text look as spare and precise as it reads – suggestive of poetry – are characteristically Aesthetic. Meynell’s writing avoids strong emotion or affect and cultivates the abstract, a hallmark of “high art” style, but one which challenged expectations of feminine prose. The absence of didacticism in *The Children* contributes to an oblique commentary on the subject of maternity, a stylistic choice which shuns the more explicit or confrontational manner of other feminist writers; as Frawley suggests of Meynell’s similarly indirect style of poetry on the subject, this helped her “challenge essentialistic assumptions about maternity”.⁴⁰ I would add that through writing in proximity with the field of psychology Meynell lays claim to a cultural legitimacy denied to the personal voice of the mother.

‘That Pretty Person’ focuses on the notion of child “genius”, framed within the historical and cultural perspective of a post-Darwinian society. The title, like that of another essay ‘The Darling Young’, which is credited to the poet Francis Thompson, is a quotation from another male writer (the Jacobean theologian, Jeremy Taylor in his description of his friend’s small son). This choice of male authored epithets thus carefully deflects any sentimentality in tone toward the child away from herself as a woman writer. Turning against cultural truism, Meynell observes that although it is “our own modern age that is charged with haste”(TC 31) the post-Darwinian, late-nineteenth century has in fact shown itself to be patient, to be interested in the value of process itself. This cultural shift, enabling the period of childhood to be evaluated as a unique and valuable stage, is:

an interesting and unnoticed thing cast up by the storm of thoughts. This is a disposition, a general consent, to find the use and the value of process, and even to understand a kind of repose in the very wayfaring of progress. With this is a resignation to change, and something more than resignation – a delight in those qualities that could not be but for their transitoriness (*TC* 28).

Unlike the anticipations of eugenic fitness many child psychologists had for the child, Meynell finds a “timely perfection” in the child; a perfection which is reconfigured in a post-teleological spirit as part of a series of processes, an observation Meynell produces through a contrast with the seventeenth century. Parenting, in a patriarchal society, displays gendered perspectives on child development; while mothers submit to the natural flow of time, fathers are deemed restless: “education, some two hundred years ago [was] nothing but an impatient prophecy (the father’s) of the full stature of body and mind”

(*TC*29). By contrast, it is significantly the Indian mother’s “primitive” lullaby, which expresses a patient prophecy, and it is implied, a greater, innate understanding of process: “she sings a song about the robe while she spins, and a song about bread as she grinds corn”(*TC* 29). Her love for the child, whilst anticipating the child’s safety on reaching maturity is based on a “primitive” understanding of the (modern) truth of its nature – drawing on the romantic notion of the noble savage.

Male parenting values are highlighted through the subject of child genius. On the death of the son of John Evelyn – “that pretty person” – at age five, Evelyn and his friends’ praise for the boy’s academic achievements is criticised for the way in which the child’s genius is co-opted by these men to serve masculine ideals and principles. Intellectual precocity, the acting “out of the course of nature” (*TC* 30) so “exquisite” to Evelyn, is not

deemed of especial value to the writer, nor should it be, Meynell suggests, to any modern. Meynell confidently states “[o]ur fathers valued change for the sake of its results; we value it in the act. To us the change is revealed as perpetual; every passage is a goal, and every goal a passage” (*TC* 31). But this conclusion can only be produced through the exclusion of class in her analysis, an element conspicuously absent; the working-class children whose cheap labour meant that their economic value superseded appreciation of their human worth, would undercut her conclusions about the nineteenth-century’s enlightened view of childhood.⁴¹

The heroising of the boy genius was popular in cultural representation at this period, as the art historian Susan P. Casteras has demonstrated of paintings portraying the boyhood of celebrated figures;⁴² Casteras’ readings invite the reflection that Meynell’s criticisms of the egotism of the patriarch for the gifted young male could well be further transposed beyond the seventeenth, to the nineteenth century. Meynell’s feminist historical perspective highlights the division between cultural representation of girl and boy children by noting how the domesticity associated with the female denies her childhood:

[s]ee, moreover, how the fashion of hurrying childhood prevailed in literature and how it abolished little girls. It may be said that there were in all ages – even those – certain few boys who insisted upon being children; whereas the girls were docile to the adult ideal. Art, for example, has no little girls (*TC* 33).

Little girls in art have a precocious sense of sexuality conferred upon them, unpalatable to the Victorian public: “[n]ow and then an ‘Education of the Virgin’ is the exception, and then it is always a matter of sewing and reading. As for the little girl saints [...] they are always recorded as refusing importunate suitors, which seemed necessary to make them interesting to

the mediaeval mind but mars them for ours” (*TC* 34). Any tone of polemicism, through a more contemporary reference for example, is absent here, compromising any pressing critical edge to her feminist concerns. These girl children are historically removed from the reader; they belong to the past. Yet Meynell’s problematisation of innocence and romance does bring such apparent archaism a little closer up to date reminding the reader that “poets turned April into May” and that even Keats “boasted of untimely flowers” (*TC* 35). As with the boy genius, the little girl, who has a premature identity conferred upon her, is made to serve the interests and appetites of patriarchy.

The essentially childlike nature of the genius – “[i]n a sense, genius itself is only prolonged infancy”⁴³ – in which mystic communion with Nature was accessible to both these subjects, was a prevalent view in the scientific literature. In ‘The Influential Child’, an essay which rehearses Ruskinian ideas about the way in which art expresses the national character, Meynell examines boy “genius” again, and his relation to Nature in a way which racialises and nationalises the subject, enlisting the figure of the “child genius” for empire-building. The brilliance of Vaughan, Traherne, Wordsworth and Turner is located in their British nationality, an identity which enables their special relationship with a quintessentially North European, and British Nature in their boyhoods.

In comparing the representation of nature in Japanese, British and French art, Meynell draws upon a national hierarchy in which the “child” nation is inferior; here this is Japan (one of England’s economic competitors) which falls behind the “manly” nation of England whose great art is inspired by the boy genius’s spiritual love of Nature. The Japanese are found unromantic and of limited perception; they are pejoratively infantilised as “these little people” and they possess a landscape art which is “gay, observant, and arbitrary”⁴⁴ (in contrast to the enlightenment ideal of reason) in the pleasure it takes in Nature. Visionary inspiration and

intuition are apparently innate to the British child, as if transmitted through their interaction with the native environment: “[m]any a child of our race has received that early inspiration , and these men of early genius not only received and remembered but put it on such records to make it thence forward a part of our literature”;⁴⁵ the boy genius is thus configured as a symbol of empire, for his contribution to the national culture.

Meynell’s writing participates in the dominant, Romantic concept of the child mobilised by other feminist writers, such as Grand, as a means of exploring pedagogical issues. The nature which children love is a wild one, not the formality of Italian gardens, but “hillsides in wild flower, calm summer seas”⁴⁶ – what she describes as a Tennysonian sense of landscape. But the values of Romanticism are reworked in the modernity of psychological studies which both Meynell and Grand make of the child; the abstract register of the scientific forms a site of convergence between two women whose writing and feminist identity were so removed from each other. The language of Romanticism was of course not confined to female writers at the end of the nineteenth century, or to the literary, yet it offered women an intellectual register of affective sensibility of emotional and spiritual sensitivity, and the grounds for a social protest for the importance of free play of the child.

When in ‘Under the Early Stars’ Meynell states that “(c)hildhood is antiquity” (*TC* 46) she evokes not only the Wordsworthian belief that “the child is the father of the man”, but the antiquity of an atavistic succession: “[h]e is the beginning and the result of the creation of man” (*TC* 43). Play is linked to their sensitivity to the seasonal; children “find a stimulus of fun and fear in the autumn darkness outside the windows. There is a frolic with the reflection, and with the country night” (*TC* 41); Wordsworthian notions of freedom express the integrity of the child. But the value of rebelliousness with which they “strike some blow for liberty” (*TC* 45) also sets up associations with the wildness of infantile evolutionary instincts. The

naturalness of play to the child, determined by diurnal rhythms so out of keeping with those of parentally imposed civilisation, is of “primitive” origin:

when twilight comes, there comes also the punctual wildness. The children will run and pursue, and laugh for the mere movement – it does so jog their spirits. What remembrances does this imply of the hunt, what of the predatory dark? The kitten grows alert at the same hour, and hunts for moths and crickets in the grass. It comes like an imp, leaping on all fours. The children lie in ambush and fall upon one another in the mimicry of hunting (*TC* 45).

The correspondence being made between young animals and human children and the reversion to hunting, a prehistoric behaviour, at twilight, linked to a time which evokes liminal psychic states, invites comparison with the observations made by Darwin and followed by other studies in this field. In his book *The Child*, Chamberlain gives tables of the periods of growth in childhood devised by anthropologists,⁴⁷ which derive from Comtean Positivism. Auguste Comte, drawing upon Saint-Simon, had envisaged human history as progressing through three successive stages: theological, metaphysical and finally the positive, in which scientific laws were discovered. These tables illustrate a parallel teleological anthropological schema of “savagery”, “barbarism”, and “civilisation”. In one table the second stage of cultural development “Hunting and Capture” corresponds to the period in a child’s life between the ages four to twelve, of which the seventh year is the height, where children recapitulate the actions of that era in their behaviour. The play and games of this stage listed by Chamberlain include “ ‘Bo-Peep’ (stealth, stalking; approach, ambush, surprise)” and “ ‘Hide and Seek’ ”.⁴⁸ However, Meynell makes a distinction which

disputes the child self's mirroring earlier "racial" experience; she suggests that although "[t]he habit of prehistoric races has been cited as the only explanation of the fixity of some customs in mankind" (*TC* 46) enquirers could look to their own infancy to see how such practices, such as the lullaby, continue to be culturally transmitted down the ages. Of course to the evolutionist the two were precisely the same thing; ancestral memory in the child often only being "awoken" by present customs which were themselves Tyloryan "survivals".

Meynell then curiously reinforces this division between English children and a colonial, racial Other which is implied by Lamarckian theory:

[i]f English children are not rocked to many such aged lullabies, some of them are put to sleep to strange cradle-songs. The affectionate races that are brought in to subjection sing the primitive lullaby to the white child. Asiatic voices and African persuade him to sleep in the tropical night; his closing eyes are filled with alien images (*TC* 47).

In her discussion of Meynell's ambivalence toward maternity in her poems, Frawley has argued that the juxtaposition of the English to the Asiatic and African here is deployed to "suggest states of subjection and of subjectivity"⁴⁹ in motherhood. I would add that the alien strangeness experienced by the infant, rather than wholly expressing uneasy comment on the absence of the biological mother, should be read in the context of Meynell's prefacing comments on the "habits of prehistoric races". "Brought into subjection" implies a colonial relationship (which is further inflected with the servitude of domestic work), yet if she is describing the colonial child who is literally living in the "tropical night" of India or South Africa, then surely the images will not be "alien", they will be familiar, everyday surroundings. They may be exoticised to the reader though, to whom the scene of a white

baby in a tropical night, may provide a seeming incongruity and alienness. It may be that Meynell signals a psychic distance between the white child and the “racial” (m)other: the song is “alien” to the child because it does not express the “antiquity” which she describes as native to that child, experienced in romantic traditions (old French lullabies). It is an antiquity premised on an essential racial identity in which the young child can intuit from the lullabies sung to them a sense of ancient cultural history - signified through her use of the phrases a “sound of history”, and further, a “sense of mystery” (which takes us back to the essay on the Englishness of the boy genius) – to which they belong. Because the child does not recognise the song, Meynell implicitly dismisses a paleopsychic evolutionary kinship with the “affectionate races”, and by implication the racist schema of an evolutionary hierarchy; her description nonetheless creates a startling image of identity dislocation and racial difference based on an innate sense of cultural or racial autochthony in the white, English child.

The Children forms the main discussion in James Sully’s essay in the *Fortnightly Review*, ‘The Child in Recent English Literature’. Finding that she has, in appropriately feminine style “applied her prettiest manners” to a “pretty theme”, Sully declares his intention to decide whether the “nice pen of Mrs Meynell” in its “dainty excursions along the clean edges of children’s ways” can also be “a faithful reporter and a competent interpreter”.⁵⁰ A comparison emerges between the literary prose style of a woman writer, which is gendered feminine (nice pen, dainty excursions, clean edges) and a scientific, male-authored, truthful reporting. In his autobiography, despite his ambivalence over mothers’ involvement in science, Sully several times mentions his support of women’s entry into higher education, and had himself taught in women’s colleges, such as Maria Grey at U.C.L.⁵¹ Meynell’s literary volume based on facts of child life should be criticised in relation to the scientific study of the child, he suggests, for “it exposes itself to the critical consideration of those, who being

friends of the child are still more friends of the truth”.⁵² Indeed, he firmly locates Meynell’s collection in relation to the founding studies in the field, those of Preyer and Darwin.

Of most interest to Sully is Meynell’s ‘The Young Child’, which in its charting and dating of the stages of skills acquisitions in an infant’s growth, closely resembles the studies in the pages of *Knowledge* and *Popular Science Monthly*.⁵³ In her exact description and dating of the baby’s first smile and other inaugural behaviours such as crying and laughing, he finds that “Mrs Meynell’s maternal intuitions”⁵⁴ compare unfavourably with the findings of “[t]wo trained observers [...] Charles Darwin [and] Professor Preyer”.⁵⁵ Admitting that her manner of generalisation is effective in creating an impressive literary style, sonorous, solemn and serene, he concludes that it does not match the more cautious manner of the scientific accounts he refers to: “[w]hen it is said that these statements about the infant are clothed with Mrs Meynell’s severest objectivity, no “perhaps”, or “I think” being permitted to show a timid subject who gives them birth, the reader will understand that this chapter is rightly described as remarkable.”⁵⁶ Sully’s indignant objection imputes something like audacity to Meynell for venturing her assertions *without the training proper to infant watching*.

In Meynell’s child’s preference for work instead of play, Sully finds such a child to be too modern; for him, such a child does not exhibit the savage tendencies that he documents in his own work. Meynell suggests that amongst the joys of foraging excursions such as nutting and haymaking, children take more pleasure in the “work” of haymaking, in contrast, Sully’s analysis which draws on models of the instinctual behaviour of primitive types in the anthropological tables of Chamberlain, insists that “[t]he common child seems to find in everything which has in it a smack of the chase, whether in hunting for primroses, for blackberries, or for nuts, something of the wild pleasure of the primeval huntsman”.⁵⁷ His criticisms markedly downplay Meynell’s insistence on the wildness and “love of liberty” (*TC*

83) of the child which recurs throughout her writing, as I have demonstrated above, conveying Meynell as a more formal and formidable parent.

Meynell's findings of infinite variety in the child as it leaves infancy are held up against understanding of evolutionary scientific tenets: "[u]niformity in infancy and infinite diversity in childhood may read oddly coming from the pen of one who uses the word evolution";⁵⁸ Sully attributes this failure of perception to a subjective imperative which insists upon the superiority and individuality of her own children. The female view is inherently flawed by parental pride and prejudice, since "there is uppermost in the writer the maternal attitude which inwardly guards 'my child's' sayings and doings from confusion with the vulgar stock";⁵⁹ a position which prevents women from making the reliable, rational observation which a scientific vocabulary would furnish them with.

In his *Studies of Childhood* which is more scholarly and conservative than the *Cornhill* article 'Babies and Science', much of the first chapter is taken up with the negotiation of the role of women in the enterprise of child psychology. This is clearly a problematic area of ambiguity for the male psychologist, because it is women who are properly in charge of the child's welfare, but objectivity compromises the ideal of the domestic "angel". Even those women trained in psychology, once they become mothers, will have crossed the Rubicon and are disqualified from being science practitioners because their judgement is clouded by their biological instincts:

[e]ven in these days of rapid modification of what used to be thought unalterable sexual characters, one may be bold enough to hazard the prophecy that women who have had scientific training will if they happen to become mothers, hardly be disposed to give their minds at the very outset to the rather complex and difficult work.⁶⁰

Sully's conclusion finds that Meynell endows her subject with a precocity which is unnatural in its "absolute seriousness" and "fine air of superiority";⁶¹ her text:

presents to us a type of young person which [...] seems far removed from the plane of a natural and unadulterated childhood. Perhaps the child of the future is to pass into this type. Yet the perusal of Mrs Meynell's book is fitted to set the old-fashioned child lover praying fervently that the transformation may not be yet.⁶²

Unlike other contemporary critics whose praise of her contributed to the construction of Meynell's public persona as an "angel",⁶³ Sully's lament over her portrayal of the modern child indirectly reveals a revolt against the modern, "unwomanly" mother/writer whose children's language and manner do nothing more precocious than reflect the world of the middle-class child from a literary household.⁶⁴

Alice Meynell's writing on children is, of course, also implicitly a treatment of motherhood. She does not explicitly refer to her experience as a mother, a strategy which, paradoxically, seems to aim at imparting greater authority; to write "as a mother" does not have the cultural legitimacy which is consonant with the rest of Meynell's body of work and field. This detachment is reinforced by her taut and refined style which produces effects of control and authority, through its use of generalisation and counter generalisation, for example. Her positioning of herself in this volume as an outside observer and analyst, through an abstract detachment, has a feminist effect which undermines the biologically essentialist views of scientists like Sully, as is clear in his sometimes hostile criticisms. Meynell's treatment of the mother and the child self in a disconnected style which crosses back and forth

between the sensory and emotional recollection of childhood experience and the observation of the parent, possesses a complexity which belongs in part to a Paterian aesthetic, and the literary technique of associationism, expounded and practised by her fellow female aesthete Vernon Lee. Among those associations Meynell's prose makes is with a scientific discourse of the child, but it expresses a modernity which participates in and exceeds the evolutionary frame of late nineteenth-century child science.

At a considerable remove from the aesthetic prose of Alice Meynell, Sarah Grand's rhetorical feminist writing made her the quintessential New Woman to her contemporaries; my reading will argue how in its interest in the psychological states of childhood, both women's work, while largely differing, shared some techniques. When Frances Bellenden Clarke (1854 -1943) reinvented herself, as a best-selling novelist Madame Sarah Grand she became a leading figure in late-nineteenth century social purity feminism, as I have suggested in chapter 1. Her fiction explores the possibility of female emancipation and contested gender roles, whilst endorsing marriage and motherhood of the highest standard exacted by the sexually selective "*Women of the Future*".⁶⁵ *Grand by no means advocated the sanctity of the domestic*, indeed *The Beth Book* in particular tears open "the secret life of the home"⁶⁶ so cherished by those conservative writers who were the scourges of the New Woman. Grand's moralistic stance, produced through evolutionary discourses, sees the higher nature of women as befitting progressive race leadership, conflating fears of racial degeneration with rebuttals of the professional discourses which sought to bar women from career and higher education.

Critics agree that *The Beth Book* (BB) is largely autobiographical,⁶⁷ although Grand had at one time disclaimed this in her private correspondence.⁶⁸ It is unusual both for its extended focus and for the incisive account of the sensibilities and thoughts of a young girl. Over half the novel is concerned with depicting the early childhood and adolescence of its

eponymous heroine Beth Caldwell; she is wilful, highly imaginative and sensitive, growing up in Ireland within a large family whose class identity of genteel poverty is a source of both pride and suffering. Her juvenile strivings toward poetic expression are realised later in the literature of her adult career. The fictional Beth, and the author Sarah Grand, overlap, for this history of the personality registers Grand's celebrity and impactful role in the era of the New Woman.

To represent the "literary woman of genius" was a complex enterprise for writing a feminist narrative of the self; this project will form the subject of the following chapter. If autobiography was considered an "ungentlemanly" form for even the most eminent Victorian men, one which required careful generic strategies to achieve modest documentation of intellectual achievement,⁶⁹ then, as Valerie Sanders in her study of nineteenth-century women's autobiography suggests, it was an even more fraught genre for Victorian women, who risked greater social censure for transgressive self-promotion.⁷⁰

The feminist impulse which seeks to register women's contribution to culture would be further undermined by the prevailing cultural equation of mass culture and "woman" which Huyssen has theorised,⁷¹ with the result that only an act of disavowal – the repudiation of society's approbation and of material gain – can confirm true "literary genius". The adult Beth claims that "[n]othing worth doing in art is done by calculation" (*BB* 521); by designating her acts of literary production and public speaking, seen as particularly disreputable activities for Victorian women in the culture, as instinctual and spontaneous, Sarah Grand capitulates with cultural hegemony on women's role in public spheres (*BB* 453). We will see how the extended treatment of the psychological portrait of the "child genius" in the light of new hereditarian knowledge negotiates these ideological difficulties.

Patricia Murphy, in an article on Grand which situates her feminist social purity within debates on female inferiority in Darwinian science, contends that *The Beth Book* selects “‘evolutionary psychology’ as its implicit target”. Murphy suggests that:

The Beth Book unmask[s] Darwinian psychology as an apologia for cultural norms and scientific “truth” as an ideological reinforcement from those norms. In exposing the flaws of this self-designated empirical discipline, the novel questions the very integrity of the scientific process itself and exposes its underlying but unrecognised motivation to reinscribe social policy.⁷²

I argue the opposite; rather than making the critical distinction between science and ideology, or nature and culture, Grand strategically deploys scientific discourses with which to promote feminist goals. A reconsideration of Grand’s engagement with evolutionary psychology in *The Beth Book* by focusing on childhood section of the novel, will examine leading contemporary writers on childhood psychology and genius to demonstrate her sanctioning of contemporary scientific sources.

In chapter two the narrator evokes a devouring scientific gaze with which to study the “literary genius”:

each incident that she remembered is apparently trifling in itself, but who can say of what significance as an indication? *In those first few years, had there been any there with intelligence to interpret*, they probably would have found foreshadowings of all she might be and do, and suffer; and that would have been the time to teach her. To me, therefore, *these earliest impressions are more interesting than much that occurred to her in after life*

and I have carefully collected them in the hope of finding some clue in them to what followed [...] It would be affectation, therefore to apologise for such detail. Nothing can be trivial or insignificant that tends to throw light on the mysterious growth of our moral and intellectual being (*BB* 11, my italics).

Like Meynell's associationism, Grand also presents experience and sense of self in an impressionistic manner here. A series of disconnected babyhood experiences convey the nature of early memory, its strange quality and incongruity of images characteristic of dreams, in order to explore psychological states. Close attention to the relationship between the self and language, its role in constructing experience rather than just expressing it, is another resemblance to an aestheticist perspective suggestive of both writers' anticipation of modernist techniques.

Beth's story begins on the day of her birth, in which the unenlightened Mrs. Caldwell, mother of six, is cold and tired and waiting for her dissolute husband to return home:

[t]he fire and the book – who knows what they might not have meant, what a benign difference the small relaxation allowed to the mother at this critical time might not have made in the temperament of the child? Perhaps, if we could read the events even of that one day aright, we should find in them the clue to all that was inexplicable in its subsequent career (*BB* 2).

Lamarckian theories in which the maternal influence, not only the effect of diet and other physical factors, but moral well-being was transmitted to the child, lend support to feminist protest about the importance of the material, spiritual and intellectual welfare of women – “

the fire and the book” – particularly in respect of prenatal care which assumed a growing importance toward the turn of the century. These ideas remained popular amongst feminist writers well into the twentieth century, in the birth-control literature of Marie Stopes for example, where making love in the outdoors could confer the beauty of Nature upon the child at the moment of conception. The question of the social transmission of values and ideas of female self-worth from mother to daughter is also evident here. Although her relationship with her mother will be a destructive one, Beth later has the guidance and love of another older woman, her great-aunt, and will be connected to other images of birthing and regeneration in the novel.⁷³ Such studies and their interest for eugenics position this text within the contemporary debate over nature and nurture; Grand signals the sociological significance of girlhood “genius” within a feminist episteme which encompasses scientific knowledges for “race” reform.

Looking both forwards and backwards in the history of the human soul, the figure of the child was seen as prophetic *and* atavistic, divine and brutish. For G. Stanley Hall, the child and the race were keys to each other; by fostering the right conditions in childhood, humanity would yet attain to higher levels of evolutionary development and transcend the modern tendency to degenerate.⁷⁴ The principle of common descent in the genealogy of human relations was often configured in the metaphor of “the Family of Man”: within this paradigm the child was referred to as the “father of man”, in the sense of possessing qualities pre-dating many civilised aspects of human behaviours. Yet with each successive generation and its variation, the infant with its semblance of genius also promised progress. The child was constituted as a site invested with anxieties about descent, because of its access to a past shared with racial and cultural “others”, and with the hopes for future progressive cultural evolution.

In *The Beth Book*, as a little girl Beth is linked to earlier stages of racial history by a series of paleopsychic experiences: she sees ghosts, has hallucinations, visionary dreams and enjoys heightened and extra-sensory perception. Hallucinations were numbered by Sully (1895) and Chamberlain (1900) as the survivals of primitive perception. Such mysticism was described as a mnemonic survival from “primitive cultures” by Chamberlain: “[t]he paranoiac, the child and the savage all vivify nature, to use Tylor’s apt expression, ‘[with them] anything is somebody’ ”.⁷⁵

When Beth has a vision of a man on a gibbet (*BB* 36) her prosaic minded family scorn her, and their servant Kitty is the only one to sympathise with or believe her, because being an Irish Catholic, she can (according to popular cultural constructs of the Irish as closer to “savages”) share in Beth’s atavistic mysticism. Amongst a series of recurrent images of death in the narrative of Beth’s early childhood are the killing of animals, acts described through instinctual and sacrificial language which evokes reversion to atavism: “[t]he hearth stone was the place of execution. When she found a beetle she would blow him along to it with the bellows, and there despatch him”(*BB* 17). She tries to bury a kitten alive in a box, unconsciously making a sacrifice of it: “Beth instantly put on the lid and the kitten was a corpse which must be buried”(*BB* 24) – until the gardener intervenes. Grieving over the departure of Kitty with an “animal-like expressionless gravity of countenance”, Beth tries to kill a rock-pigeon by strangling it: “[s]he let the bird drop, and stood looking at him, as an animal might have looked, with an impassive face which betrays no shade of emotion” (*BB* 42). Beth must pass through a series of stages into socialisation, “she had no horror of any creature in her childhood but as she matured her whole temperament changed in this respect”, and these transform her perceptions of “nature” and her place in it. As she emerges from her

wild, “savage” state, the community begins to accept her: “no one thought of shooting her [with a silver bullet] now”(BB 82).

The narrator continues to develop Beth’s identity as “genius”, from a democratic structure of feeling⁷⁶ in which she empathises with the family servants, toward values of nobility which distinguish her from the working class and Irish peasantry through a discourse of ethnological hierarchy – “at this time, the grownup people of her race were creatures with a natural history other than her own”(BB 82) – which consolidates the notions of natural aristocracy integral to the class-based eugenicists’ vision of the fittest.

In the field of psychology, we see that the phylogenetic stages of development were deemed necessary by psychologists in attaining to adulthood, and allowing for their free expression in the appropriate environment involve significant pedagogical issues which are shared by Grand’s text. Pedagogical debates feature prominently in G. S. Hall’s writing; there is a strong compassion for childhood happiness in which he sought to retain the Romantic belief in the innocence of childhood through the espousal of a Rousseauesque savagery. Denouncing Gradgrindian methods of schooling he exhorts the reader as pedagogue to “perpetually incite” the child to “visit field, forest, hill, shore, the water, flowers, animals, the true homes of childhood in this wild, undomesticated stage from which modern conditions have kidnapped and transported him”.⁷⁷ Children’s play exhibits “roving, tribal and predatory” activities which are all read as “primal hereditary impulses” by Hall, and which should be encouraged if we wish the child to become a balanced adult subject. Thus he advocates the cathartic enactment of neo-atavistic traits: “[r]udimentary organs of the soul now suppressed, perverted or delayed, to crop out in menacing forms later, would be developed in their season so that we should be immune to them in maturer years”.⁷⁸ Whilst Hall himself was more cautious in recommending such freedom for females, these analyses

clearly have implications for feminist pedagogy on the gendering of girls, and in this respect the celebration of “savagery” is shared by Grand’s portrayal. She treats of childish fantasising and fears as normative, and values the role of play and mimicry in development; the novel suggests that Beth should be able to roam free from convention and the prison-house shades of school. The heroine’s rebellious but (paleopsychically) healthy exploits in natural settings include solitary midnight escapades where she “walked on all fours, turned head over heels, embraced the trunks of trees, and hailed them with the Eastern invocation, ‘O tree, give me of thy strength’” (*BB* 107), hunted and killed rabbits, fished on the rocks by herself, played naked on the beach and led games with her all girl posse.

The emphasis on environmental pressures and constraints in this novel is consonant with traditional feminist narratives of female development. Grand qualifies her dismissal of the role of education in contributing to Beth’s “genius” by recording both the cultural and material privileges which her brothers enjoy, and Beth’s subsequent suffering by exclusion from such male frameworks of socialisation and educational opportunity. The importance of a favourable environment for allowing the child’s superiority to flourish is indicated, but as Grand makes clear, Beth must struggle to make her own education in the face of her lack of formal schooling.

Hall had promoted an understanding of the child and of the genius, as normative or non-degenerate: “[t]he flecks of past racial sins may, perhaps, be detected in him, as in the genius, but that he is criminal because he is a child is as doubtful as it is that the genius is often near the lunatic or the physically decrepit because he is a genius.”⁷⁹ Thus each study informed the other: “[t]he more we learn about the normality of the phenomena of childhood, the less inclined shall we be to doubt the normality of genius.”⁸⁰ Sully in his study of genius and precocity concludes that “genius is not incompatible with a prolonged, and late

development,” yet “the real genius is precociously equipped at the start and a favourable environment establishes and sets in relief his superiority”.⁸¹ Beth exemplifies the former of these two states by a prolonged and late development in which she does not acquire her reading and writing skills until well after her peers: “truth was, she had no use for letters or figures” (*BB* 19) and “books to be deciphered remained a wonder and mystery to [her]” (*BB* 46). Instead she develops her memory and imaginative faculties, which division of abilities we will see later, are made by Francis Galton in his classification of the child “hereditary genius”. Hall and Sully’s views of the normality of “genius” participated in Galton’s optimism which in refiguring “genius” within ethnology and biology transformed this hallmark of degeneracy to the apex of eugenic fitness.

As I suggest in the introduction and in chapter 1, recent criticism has begun to uncover the ways in which eugenics prompted feminist interest and endorsement during its popularisation at the turn of the century. But the notion of eugenic fitness is a feminist concern not only as it pertains to the motherhood of the New Woman, but also in the representation of childhood. Beth has her sororal, fictional predecessor in Evadne in *The Heavenly Twins* (1893). The first book of this triple-decker opens with “Childhoods and Girlhoods” and is prefaced with a quotation from Darwin: “I am inclined to agree with Francis Galton in believing that education and environment produce only a small effect on the mind of anyone, and that most of our qualities are innate.”⁸² Like *The Heavenly Twins*, *The Beth Book* also endorses this essentialist tendency, producing the child and the “genius” through evolutionary discourses.

Penny Boumelha has linked Francis Galton’s treatment of the monomaniacal aspect of genius, with Lombroso’s,⁸³ but if we look at his amendments made in the second edition 1892 preface of *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences* (1869) we see that

Galton clearly questions the equations by Lombroso and his school, of “genius” with a pathological state: “I cannot go nearly so far as they, nor accept a moiety of their data, on which the connection between ability of a very high order and insanity is supposed to be established”.⁸⁴ Galton largely repudiates the pathologisation of “genius”, and by marshalling the popular contemporary notion of genius as “exceptional talent”, produces not a technical term, but inaugurates a new understanding of “genius” through the establishment of its innate, hereditary basis. Few women feature in Galton’s canon of illustrious English figures in this book since “genius” is said to be inherited on the paternal side. His analysis does not admit the determination of social and material factors in individual success, and in particular he claims that genius excludes the effects of education (unlike mere ability, which can be improved with education). He traces the appearance of genius in families and between races concluding that the Europeans are the highest race and, predictably, that the English are the highest of all. By understanding human ability and its hereditary basis, Galton can promote his main objective that “a race of sane men may be formed, who shall be as much superior mentally and morally to the modern European as the modern European is to the lowest of the Negro races.”⁸⁵ Genius represented a highly desirable variation, or in his technical term a “sport”,⁸⁶ which would change the typical centre of the distribution of faculties in the race, making a step forward in evolution. Genius thus becomes a signifier of eugenic fitness.

In *The Beth Book*, a series of visions and dreams which characterise Beth’s childhood are fundamental to understanding her genius, or as Grand terms it here, her “further faculty”. Critics, through recourse to Kristevan theory of the relationship of the feminine to the semiotic, have commented upon these aspects resembling the pre-linguistic *chora* or *imaginary* which Beth must eventually relinquish for the patriarchal social sphere and language structures. Beth, Lyn Pykett suggests, is connected to a “world of dream and the

irrational, from which she becomes separated only by her entry into phallogentric language and the workaday world of her historic self".⁸⁷ I would add that rather than being wholly a gendered space it has also a racial significance.

The depiction of this unconscious realm is of importance in signifying Beth's connection to a shared memory of race ancestry: as a child she is closer to this experience because of her proximity, phylogenetically, to her ancestors, according to prevailing theory, as discussed above. Chamberlain cites the mid-nineteenth-century psychologist Mismar, to illustrate the underpinning of recapitulative doctrine to the hierarchisation of races: "[t]he child of an uncultivated race is obliged to learn everything, while the child of the civilised race has only to remember".⁸⁸ Beth's special poetic ability and affinity to language are also designated as innate faculties, transmitted from her ancestors, and marking out her finer, superior nature. Evolutionary discourses of, and hopes for, racial regeneration converge on the child genius. She experiences an intense sense of contiguity to her progenitors:

[i]t may have been hereditary memory, a knowledge of things transmitted to her by her ancestors along with her features, virtues and vices [...] she herself was sure that she possessed power of some kind in her infancy which gradually lapsed as her intellectual faculties developed. She was conscious that the senses had come between her and some mysterious joy which was not of the senses, but of the spirit. There lingered what seemed to be the recollection of a condition anterior to this, a condition of which no tongue can tell, which is not to be put into words, or made evident to those who have no recollection; but which some will comprehend by the mere allusion to it. All her life long Beth preserved a half-consciousness of this something – something which eluded her – something from which she gradually drifted further away as she grew older – some sort of

vision which opened up fresh tracts to her; but whether of country, or whether of thought, she could not say (*BB* 28).

The interchangeability of the terms of “country” and “thought” as “fresh tracts”, with its meanings of temporal and spatial stretches, areas of land, and passages or texts, suggests an interrelationship between literary production and the racial for this individual, enabled by this visionary ability, linking racial genius with national culture.

Visionaries occupy a section in Galton’s *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (1883). Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the cultural categorisation of women as intuitive rather than logical, Galton finds that “the power of visualising is higher in the female sex than the male”.⁸⁹ However, what is more intriguing is Galton’s positive estimation of visionaries; in the tradition of Romanticism the creativity of their ability to visualise without language and to hallucinate is valued. He argues that “[a] notable proportion of sane persons have had not only visions, but actual hallucinations”⁹⁰ – a view which reverses negative perceptions of qualities traditionally associated with the feminine.⁹¹ The “genius” as visionary is situated in a context of racial hierarchy. Such visionaries, belonging to highly civilised races, must harness and develop their abilities for cultural and intellectual innovation Galton urged, to be recognised by a “yet unformed science of education” for “the new duty”, and to contribute to the coming eugenic “race”.

Grand’s notion of visionary powers resembles Galton’s in its pedagogical implications, through its emphasis on an innate disposition. Galton finds that “our bookish and wordy education tends to repress this valuable gift of nature”, regretting that in children this faculty is sadly “blunted by repression” and he insists that “language and book learning certainly tend to dull it”.⁹² In *The Beth Book*, the narrator states that “had the development of

her genius depended upon careful acquisition of such knowledge as is to be had at school, it must have remained *latent* for ever”(BB 120, my italics highlight the significance of this term in heredity theory). Instead, her talents will proclaim themselves independently of education, because they are inherent. Like Galton’s autodidactic subjects, whose visualising powers would assist their intellectual growth, Beth’s creative talent springs from such instinctive processes: “from the first her memory helped itself by the involuntary association of incongruous ideas”(BB 17).

In one of Beth’s dreams, tracts of country and thought are blended again. She dreams she is underneath an island, in a cave lit by torches and filled with strange people in ancient dress whom she knows to be distant relations:

[s]he knew she was under Dorman’s Isle, but she knew also that it was the dark space beneath the stage of a theatre [...] she used to wonder how it was she knew those people were her ancestors, and that the place was like any part of the theatre. She had never heard either of ancestors or theatres at that time. Was it recollection or is there some more perfect power to know than the intellect – a power lying latent in the whole race which will eventually come into possession of it; but which at present, only some few rare beings are perfectly endowed (BB 27).

The island has often figured culturally as a metaphor for the individual, “I”. Gillian Beer in her essay ‘Discourses of the Island’, draws attention to the consonance between the ego and the island – which in English has the resonance of “I” – the individual, and her relation to space, in representations of the island in cultural discourse:

[t]he island, the pocket – the house – the circle – the individual – the literary canon – the theatre – the book: with varying degrees of extension all these concepts overlap with that of the island, exaggerating one or another characteristic to form a new topography [...] the tight fit of the island to individual to island permits a gratification which may well rely not only on cultural but on pre-cultural sources.⁹³

In biology, as Darwin's founding Galapagos studies established, islands were recognised as constituting special environmental conditions for natural selection, because they produced highly individuated indigenous species adapted to a unique habitat. In anthropology, Havelock Ellis claimed that the British Isles, as islands, constituted a geographically superior location for producing racial greatness; he suggested "even at the present time" that Britain's " 'islands' form, therefore, a well-arranged pair of compact electric batteries for explosive fusion of the two elements",⁹⁴ the fair race and the dark, Saxon and Celt. In Beth's dream, the island with its superior racial admixture has associations with the theatre. Here the theatre is a mnemonic figure, for it has long symbolised the mind and memory faculty,⁹⁵ which signifies the site of ancestral memory, of which childhood offered a rare and fleeting glimpse. Theatre as memory, and its conflation with the island peopled by ancestors, combine to signify an experience of selfhood as evolutionary, and of the visionary as race regenerator.

The treatment of the child in the new psychology also informed that of the "genius", and eugenic hopes were invested in both as markers of the emergence of a revitalised "race". Their configuration in *The Beth Book* demonstrate Grand's pressing of discourses of evolutionary psychology into the service of feminist visions of the woman of the future. Both Grand and Meynell appropriate from the Romantics a language and values which resonate for a feminist perspective. With the rise of the middle-classes, the consolidation of a domestic

sphere during the eighteenth century ensured that women were, in their domestic role, to become emblematic of civilisation. While the wild qualities of nature were esteemed and idealised by the Romantics, at the same time women were to be cultivated, and disempowered; Christine Battersby notes: “we see that just when the primitive and wild came to be valued, women themselves were being prized precisely in so far as they were domesticated”.⁹⁶ By making the connections between childhood and womanhood, in *Beth Grand* offers us an individual who is, largely, an anti-domestic figure, both in juvenility and maturity; a childhood with freedoms can be a stage of gender equality for both these women writers.

Whereas the New Woman, *Grand*, put a feminist, and eugenicist, agenda to the fore in unequivocal polemic, female aesthetes such as Alice Meynell quietly sublimated their feminism, using historical allusions to comment more obliquely on girlhood and motherhood. Likewise, Meynell’s deployment of science in her essay collection was as allusive and ambivalent as it was analytic, unlike the ideological framework integral to *Grand*’s novel. With its professionalism and scholarly rhetoric, the cultural capital of science ostensibly lent itself to appropriation by the aesthetic movement. But like the cultural resistance to the New Woman’s deployment of evolutionary scientific discourse, Meynell’s efforts were also met with opprobrium. The new science of child psychology was largely jealously guarded by male practitioners at the turn of the century, and in their eugenic visions, women were mothers, the embodied producers, not the intellectual observers of the children of empire.

¹ See George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination. English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1981); Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983); and Sally Shuttleworth, *Nature Transfigured: Science and Literature, 1700-1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1989).

² For example the critic Hugh E. M. Stutfield bemoaned of the literary New Woman, "[w]ith her head full of all the 'ologies and 'isms, with sex-problems and heredity, and other gleanings from the surgery and the lecture-room, there is no space left for humour". 'Tommyrotics', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 157 (1895): 833-845 (837).

³ See Susan Contratto, 'Psychology Views Mothers and Mothering, 1897-1980', *Feminist Re-Visions: What Has Been and Might Be*. Eds. Vivian Patraka and Louise A. Tilly (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1983): 149-179.

⁴ For a discussion of the emergence of child psychology in Europe, and Preyer's role in it see Siegfried Jaeger, 'Origins of Child Psychology: William Preyer', *The Problematic Science: Psychology in Nineteenth-Century Thought*. Eds. William R. Woodward and Mitchell G. Ash (New York: Praeger, 1982): 300-321.

⁵ William Preyer, *Seele des Kindes*: ix, in Siegfried Jaeger, *ibid*.

⁶ The pedagogical consequences of his physiological system were to reform the national school system to a "naturalised" curriculum with an emphasis on practical instruction which would fortify Germany's imperialistic powers.

⁷ F. H. Champneys, 'Notes on an Infant', *Mind* 6 (1881): 104-107. Articles on infant development feature in the journals *Knowledge*, *Education*, *Living Age*, *Pedagogical Seminar* and *Mind* amongst others.

⁸ James Sully praised the masculine heroics of Robinson's scientific penetration of the sanctity of the nursery: "[a]s to trying Dr. Robinson's experiment of getting the newly arrived visitor to suspend his whole precious weight by clasping a bar, it is pretty certain that, women being constituted as at present, only a medical man could have dreamt of so daring a feat". James Sully, *Studies of Childhood* (1896; London: Longmans Green and Co. 1897): 18.

⁹ Louis Robinson, 'Darwinism in the Nursery', *Nineteenth Century* (Nov. 1891): 831-842: (832).

¹⁰ *Ibid*: 832.

¹¹ Proposed Psychological Lab at University College London. Pamphlet (5 April 1897) Galton Archives, University College London.

¹² Unpublished correspondence between Francis Galton and James Sully, MS add. 158/3, Galton Archives, U.C.L.

¹³ James Sully, 'Babies and Science', *Cornhill Magazine* 43 (June-July, 1881): 543. This essay is reproduced in *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890*. Eds. Jenny Bourne-Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁴ For a useful Foucauldian hypothesis in reading the resistance of the New Woman to dominant discourse see Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997): 10.

¹⁵ A. M. H. B., 'Mind in the Infant', *Knowledge* (28 Dec. 1883): 386.

¹⁶ New discoveries in heredity such as Galton's theory of the "stirp" in 'A Theory of Heredity' *Anthropological Institute Journal* (1875) disproved Darwin's "pangenesis" outlined in *The Variation of Plants and Animals under Domestication, Vol. II* (1868). Later, August

Weismann's theory of the transmission of the germplasm (1883) opened up an impasse over the question of furthering social progress for some cultural commentators.

¹⁷ See Peter J. Bowler, *The Non Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpretation of a Historical Myth* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), and Ernst Mayr, *Toward a New Philosophy of Biology* (London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1988).

¹⁸ See Stephen J. Gould, *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (London: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1977).

¹⁹ James Sully, *Studies of Childhood*: (1896): 9.

²⁰ Alexander Chamberlain cites Professor Paolo Mantegazza. Alexander Chamberlain, *The Child*: 254.

²¹ Sully's psychological investigation was however, also closely associated with eugenic research. In 1897, Sully and Galton put together proposals for an Investigative Psychology Lab at U.C.L with W. H. Rivers and Karl Pearson. 325: Pamphlet (5 April 1897) Galton Papers, U.C.L.

²² James Sully, *Studies of Childhood* (1896): 113.

²³ James Sully, *Studies of Childhood* (1896): 507.

²⁴ James Sully, *My Life and Friends: A Psychologist's Memories* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd, 1918): 239.

²⁵ Carolyn Burdett, *Olive Schreiner and the Progress of Feminism* (London: Palgrave, 2000): 19.

²⁶ Ibid: 20.

²⁷ Henry Havelock Ellis, *The Criminal* (1890; fifth ed. New Jersey: Patterson Smith, 1973): 258.

²⁸ Ibid: 260.

²⁹ Vita Sackville-West gives Meynell's complaint during adolescence: "[o]f all the crying evils in this depraved earth, ay, of all the sins of which the cry must come to Heaven, the greatest, judged by all the laws of goad and humanity, is the miserable selfishness of man that keeps women from work – work, the salvation of the world". *Alice Meynell: Poetry and Prose*. Eds. F. P et al. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1947): 21.

³⁰ Talia Schaffer, 'A Tethered Angel: The Martyrology of Alice Meynell', *Victorian Poetry* (2000): 49-61.

³¹ See Vanessa Furse Jackson, ' "Tides of the mind": Restraint and Renunciation in the Poetry of Alice Meynell' *Victorian Poetry* 36: 4 (Winter 1998): 443-464.

³² Maria Frawley, 'Modernism and Maternity: Alice Meynell and the Politics of Motherhood', *Unmanning Modernism: Gendered Re-Readings*. Eds. Elizabeth Jane Harrison and Shirley Peterson (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997): 31-43.

³³ Talia Schaffer, 'A Tethered Angel', *Victorian Poetry* (2000): 49-61.

³⁴ Alice Meynell, *The Children* (1896; London: John Lane, 1897).

³⁵ Talia Schaffer records that Alice Meynell had had eight children, one of whom died at birth. Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes* (2000): 165.

³⁶ Vita Sackville-West, introduction to *Alice Meynell: Prose and Poetry*: 18.

³⁷ Letter from Meredith to Sully. Dorking (4 April 1896). Ms. Add. 158/10 Galton Archives, U.C.L.

³⁸ George Meredith, 'Mrs Meynell's Two Books of Essays', *National Review* (Aug.1896): 762-770 (766).

³⁹ Ibid: 766.

⁴⁰ Maria Frawley, 'Modernism and Maternity: Alice Meynell and the Politics of Motherhood', *Unmanning Modernism*. Eds. Elizabeth Jane Harrison and Shirley Peterson (1997): 32.

⁴¹ The absence of working-class children in Meynell's essay is common to other feminist writers, even characteristic, to middle and higher brow prose and fiction by the New Woman.

There were exceptions, such as Margaret Harkness depiction of the sweated seamstress and other characters of the poor and working-class in *A City Girl* (1887), Gertrude Dix whose socialist fiction addressed the problems of female workers in *The Image Breakers* (1900) and Lucas Malet's depiction of Jenny's daughter, Dot, a street urchin in *The Wages of Sin* (1890).

⁴² See Susan P. Casteras, 'Excluding Women. The Cult of the Male Genius in Victorian Painting' in Linda M. Shires (ed.), *Re-Writing the Victorians* (London: Routledge, 1992): 116-46.

⁴³ Alexander Chamberlain, *The Child: A Study in the Evolution of Man* (London: Walter Scott, 1900): 446.

⁴⁴ Alice Meynell, *Alice Meynell: Poetry and Prose* : 309.

⁴⁵ Ibid: 309.

⁴⁶ Ibid: 310.

⁴⁷ Chamberlain draws on Major J.W. Powell's studies of the development of human society (based on the anthropology of E.B. Tylor in *Primitive Society*). He reproduces Dr. Hutchinson's tables of numbered periods of childhood as they correlate to periods of savagery and barbarism. *The Child* (189): 58-61.

⁴⁸ Ibid: 59.

⁴⁹ See Maria Frawley, 'Modernism and Maternity' (1997): 39.

⁵⁰ James Sully, 'The Child in Recent English Literature', *Fortnightly Review* 61 ns (Feb 1897): 218-228 (218).

⁵¹ James Sully, *My Life and Friends: A Psychologist's Memories* (London: T. Fisher Unwin Ltd, 1918).

⁵² Ibid: 218.

⁵³ See for example, F. Pollock, 'The First Three Years of Childhood' *Popular Science Monthly* 14 (1877): 591-99.

⁵⁴ James Sully, 'The Child in Recent English Literature': 220.

⁵⁵ Ibid: 220.

⁵⁶ James Sully, 'The Child in Recent English Literature': 220.

⁵⁷ Ibid: 223.

⁵⁸ Ibid : 221

⁵⁹ James Sully, 'The Child in Recent English Literature': 221.

⁶⁰ James Sully, *Studies in Childhood*: 18.

⁶¹ Ibid: 224.

⁶² Ibid: 225.

⁶³ For details see Talia Schaffer, 'The Angel in Hyde Park' in *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes* (2000)

⁶⁴ One of her children wrote a note to Meynell: "[m]y dear mother, I really wonder how you can be proud of that article, if it is worthy to be called a [sic] article, which I doubt. Such a [sic] unletterary [sic] article. I cannot call it letterature [sic]. I hope you will not write any more such unconventionan [sic] trash". Alice Meynell, *The Children* (1896).

⁶⁵ Alfred Russel Wallace, co-discoverer of evolutionary theory, was cited by many feminists as a champion of women's rights. He used this phrase in his socialist eugenicist paper 'Human Selection', *Fortnightly Review* 48 (1890): 325-37.

⁶⁶ Mrs Eliza Lynn Linton, 'The Tree of Knowledge', *New Review* (June 1894): 681.

⁶⁷ See Gillian Kersley, *Darling Madame: Sarah Grand and Devoted Friend* (London: Virago 1983); Terry Lovell, *Consuming Fictions* (London: Verso 1987): 129-30; Terri Doughty, 'Sarah Grand's *The Beth Book*: The New Woman and the Ideology of the Romance Ending', *Anxious Power: Reading, Writing and Ambivalence in Narrative by Women*. Eds. Carol J. Singley and Susan Elizabeth Sweeney (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993);

and Teresa Mangum, *Married, Middlebrow and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

⁶⁹ Sarah Grand wrote: "I used some incidents of my life in *The Beth Book*, trifling experiences, but you are mistaken as to its being otherwise autobiographical. I can't think why you should suppose it is, but I have forgotten what it is all about." Grand to Gladys Singers-Bigger (4 April 1932). Sarah Grand Archive, Bath Public Library.

⁶⁹ See George Levine, 'Objectivity and Death', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 20 (1992): 273-291.

⁷⁰ For further discussion see Valerie Sanders, *The Private Lives of Victorian Women: Autobiography in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: St. Martins Press, 1989).

⁷¹ See Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Post-modernism* (London: Macmillan, 1986) and Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (London: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁷² Patricia Murphy, ' "Inferiority": Sarah Grand versus Charles Darwin', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 26: 2 (1998): 221-236 (221).

⁷³ Significantly, Beth is the seventh child, like Evadne in *The Heavenly Twins* who is also related to the number seven; she is described as coming in on the seventh wave, a reference which suggests the influence of Theosophist thought on Grand. Theosophists believed that the "seventh age" of man was coming in which he would attain physical, spiritual and mental perfection. The seventh child also had eugenic associations in the field of psychology, Henry Havelock Ellis gives the average number of children in families where a genius is produced as 6.8 (compared to an average among same social groupings of 4.52). H. Havelock Ellis, *A Study of British Genius* (1904; London: Constable and Co. Ltd, 1927): 93.

⁷⁴ Leading degenerationist Cesare Lombroso undermined the innocence of childhood by propounding a kinship between the criminal and the child. This is examined by Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991):70.

⁷⁵ See George Stocking, *Race, Culture and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1968).

⁷⁶ See Wim Neetens, *Writing and Democracy: Literature, Politics and Culture in Transition* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991): 112.

⁷⁷ G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence, 2 Vols.* (New York: D. Appleton, 1904) Vol.I: xi.

⁷⁸ Ibid: xi.

⁷⁹ Alexander Chamberlain, *The Child* (1900): 459.

⁸⁰ Ibid: 45.

⁸¹ Ibid: 42.

⁸² Sarah Grand, *The Heavenly Twins* (1893; Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1992): Book 1: 1.

⁸³ Boumelha quotes Galton's remarks in the first edition of *Hereditary Genius* on the unhealthiness of intense focus on one activity which is "perilously near to the voices heard by the insane" and links Lombroso's use of the term "degenerative", suggesting that "Lombroso goes further". Penny Boumelha 'The Woman of Genius and the Woman of Grub Street: Figures of the Female Writer' *English Literature in Transition* 40:2 (1997): 171.

⁸⁴ Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences* (1869; 1892. Second ed. Gloucester: Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1972): 27.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ "Sport" refers to a spontaneously arising favourable variation in an individual. Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius* (1892): 34.

⁸⁷ Lyn Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Novel* (London: Routledge 1992). See also Patricia Murphy, ' "Inferiority": Sarah Grand versus Charles Darwin', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 26:2 (1998): 179.

⁸⁸ Alexander Chamberlain, *The Child* (1900): 20.

⁸⁹ Francis Galton, *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development* (London: Macmillan, 1883): 69.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*: 122.

⁹¹ A process of re-evaluation of essential sexual difference anticipated in writing by New Women (1883-1899). Grand's citation of Emerson which prefaces *The Beth Book*: "The truth is in the air, and the most impressionable brain will announce it first. [...] So women, as most susceptible, are the best index of the coming hour", illustrates how essentialist feminist thought reconstructed feminine sensibility as powerful.

⁹² *Ibid*: 79.

⁹³ See Gillian Beer, 'Discourses of the Island', *Literature and Science as Modes of Expression*. Ed. F. Amrine (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishing, 1989).

⁹⁴ Henry Havelock Ellis, 'The Ancestry of Genius', *Atlantic Monthly* (March 1893): 383-389 (389).

⁹⁵ See Steven Rose, *The Making of Memory: From Molecules to Mind* (London: Bantam Press, 1992).

⁹⁶ Christine Battersby, *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetic* (London: Women's Press, 1989): 118.

Chapter 7

The “Woman of Genius”, “race” and literary value: Mona Caird’s

The Daughters of Danaus

This chapter will explore the connections between the “woman of genius”, the female creative artist, the construction of “race” and of English literary culture in New Woman fiction. How was style and purpose in the New Woman novel defined in relation to nation? and how were constructions of “race” related to cultural capital? In chapter 6, I suggested the ways in which the renewed interest in the study of “genius” was generated by the implications it had for eugenics and its contiguity with interest in child development. In this chapter, the interdependence of “race” and “genius” for a New Woman aesthetic will be explored in Mona Caird’s *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894), Sarah Grand’s *The Beth Book* (1897) and ‘The Undefinable: A Fantasia’ (1908).

The debates over “genius”, and the struggles over “pure art” and the commercial, which consolidate values of the literary market-place had particular significance for the female author seeking to claim a high status position without compromising the polemical and political medium and message of feminism; a reading of ‘The Undefinable’ illustrates the way in which genius is conceived of as outside of, and uninvolved with material concerns. The scientific construction of genius established in chapter 6 grounds exploration of the presentation of “race” in *The Beth Book* in this chapter. Discussion of Caird’s novel explores her use of scientific discourses, and in particular, how explanatory scientific notions of the “race” of genius – the Celtic – could be used by a woman writer to

participate in the discourses of the field of the literary avant-garde. This use of “race” as cultural capital demonstrates the complexity of feminist aesthetics of cultural production.

The identity of “genius”, what it consisted of, how one came to possess it, and who could claim it, was fiercely contested between feminists, eugenicists, and the other cultural critics of degeneration. As I suggested in the preceding chapter, leading theories of “genius” – particularly those which had revalued the term in the light of eugenics – held that it was an innate quality, and therefore expressed itself, in whatever field it was peculiar to, without the will of the individual. The opening remarks by Francis Galton in the 1892 edition of *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into its Laws and Consequences* suggest the degree to which opinions conflicted on the nature of “genius”. He regretted that he had not entitled his book “Hereditary Ability”, because of the degree of misinterpretation to which it was open. This choice, he explained, should indicate the specific quality of genius as innate: “*Hereditary Genius* therefore seemed to be a more expressive and just title than *Hereditary Ability*, for ability does not exclude the effects of education, which genius does.”¹ For women writers the use of the idea of the “female genius” could be used to mobilise protest for greater opportunities for middle-class women’s access to education, work, and the social sphere, as did, for example, George Paston (Emily Morse Symonds) in *A Writer of Books* (1898), Ella Hepworth Dixon in *The Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), Mary Cholmondeley in *Red Pottage* (1899), and Mabel E. Wotton in ‘The Fifth Edition’ (1896).

Penny Boumelha argues that in the late Victorian woman writer’s novel, “genius” is held to be “not earned, developed by hard work, or sought by ambition”.² There are modifications and exceptions to this view in the work of New Women writers; for example,

both Beth (*The Beth Book*) and Hadria (*The Daughters of Danaus*) must undertake a lengthy apprenticeship of hard work which builds on their innate, hereditary “genius”. Yet this predominant notion that “genius” was the exuberant expression of an irrepressible, vital force, but must be disciplined, or risk running to obsessive madness were contradictions to be reconciled in the modern construction of the “genius”.

This view was prevalent with theorists such as the German, William Hirsch whose psychological study aimed to scientise “genius” and confirm its proper identity as one divorced from the degenerate. In *Genius and Degeneration: A Psychological Study* (1896) published in England in 1897, Hirsch approvingly cited Kant’s belief that “genius must undergo the ‘constraint of the school’ (Zwang des Stadiums)”;³ for Kant, to “ free imagination from this constraint and to allow one’s peculiar talent to rove about in wild disorder contrary to the laws of Nature, might betoken, perhaps, a great original madness.”⁴ In Hirsch’s psychological treatise, for the “true genius”, “the work of genius is not a voluntary labour, but the involuntary product of a psychical need”;⁵ this is another way of saying that “genius”, as a physical characteristic, naturally forces itself into expression. Hirsch depicted the work of the genius as authentic self-expression: “[i]f he finds his work has no success nor recognition [...] he is incapable of altering anything in his work or reshaping it for a new edition. He can only be what he is. He feels himself incapable of creating anything but the embodiment of his ideas and sentiments”.⁶ This construction of the male artist as working outside of the material and cultural, economic conditions of the marketplace in a spiritual realm of “pure” self expression was a dominant one.

Vernon Lee, in contrast to Mona Caird for example, optimistically claimed that:

genius, like murder, *would out*; for genius is one of the liveliest forces of nature: not to be quelled or quenched, adaptable, protean, expansive, nay explosive; of all things in the world the most able to take care of itself [...] Hence, to my mind there are *no mute inglorious Miltons*, or none worth taking into account. (Italics in original)⁷

Wishing to mobilise, and modernise, through evolutionism the Romantic conception of the artist as united with the forces of organic nature, Lee stresses the ways in which genius is at odds with the art of the mechanical, modern age: “it is quite certain that genius has nothing in common with machinery. It is the most organic and alive of living organisms”.⁸ And by implication for Lee, indifferent to the commercial demands of market forces. We will see that for Caird’s “woman of genius”, although her ability has an organic basis, the struggle to survive and succeed is against the restrictions and obstacles stacked against her by a cultural tyranny which proves as strong a force as nature.

Sarah Grand’s ‘The Undefinable: A Fantasia’ (1908)⁹ explores what Ruskin called the undefinable of genius, “that certain Something” (‘TU’ 263) through an encounter between a male artist and a female model which reworks the definitions of, and relationships between, “genius”, muse and art. The story is another retelling of the Pygmalion myth, a central narrative in late nineteenth century art and literature – such as in Edward Burne-Jones’s series (1868-78) accompanying William Morris’s *The Earthly Paradise* (1868) – and also a recurring trope in women’s writing as I discuss in chapter 3 in relation to Vernon Lee’s prose.

Ann Heilmann suggests that ‘The Undefinable’ is about a woman artist: “subverting the stereotypical role of the muse, Grand’s female artist poses as a model”. She argues that

“[i]t is the woman artist who is infused with ‘genius’ ”,¹⁰ but nowhere in the story is the woman active as an artist/creator; she directs, but only as an active model. Indeed, the painter asks the woman why she does not paint and produce great art herself, and she replies that women have achieved much, but that woman’s time is still coming: the focus of the tale is the reformation of the male artist through the guiding influence of the female muse.

This short, allegorical story is a first-person narrative from the male artist’s perspective which enables Grand to demonstrate the shift in individual consciousness affected during the course of the narrative. He is visited by a critical muse who offers to model for him, but takes him through a process of artistic reflection and discipline, until he is inspired by the “proper” influences and thoughts to produce great art. Grand’s aesthetic in this allegory, and elsewhere, argues for a spiritual art, repudiates materialism and material detail and advocates art-forms which address and, crucially, can be seen to evaluate experience in a didactic way. Great art amongst contemporary artists has died out because “inspiration is extinct” – an evolutionary metaphor which, by implication, positions the New Woman as leading social and cultural evolution, yet as a creature still organically evolving:

‘I am altogether an outcome of the age, you will perceive, an impossible mixture of incongruous qualities, which are all in a ferment at present, but will eventually resolve themselves, as chemical combinations do, into an altogether unexpected, and seeing that already the good is outweighing the bad, indifferent ingredients, admirable composition, we will hope’(‘TU’ 280).

Despite her role as muse, traditionally passive, she is abrupt and confident: a quintessential New Woman “who claims to rule and does not care to please” (‘TU’ 267). Yet she is also archaic; she looks back to classical Greece, and by dressing herself and the artist in classical attire, attains to a suitable dignity. In her the artist sees the multi-form aspects of Woman: Sappho, Ceres, Venus and Diana (representing artist, mother, love and chastity). This evocation of classicism is not effaced by the subsequent disclaimer that she dresses in a form neither ancient or modern, but “perfectly new” (‘TU’ 278), signifying the prevalent belief in the woman’s movement that the New Woman was not in fact “new” but that there had long been a dissenting femininity.

As a gatekeeper of national culture, the role of the New Woman is to act as a moral guardian; she has the task of making the male artist morally pure and temperate. The boundary between art and life is crucial – how does life pollute or affect art and culture and vice versa? An economy of cultural production emerges in which temperance and purity must be practised in contrast to a male physical economy of decadent appetites and excessive “spending”. The woman instructs the artist of the proper path to artistic productivity; “ ‘you must wait, you know, to recover yourself. You’ve lost such lot’ ” (‘TU’ 269). His moral sense is appealed to: “she reminded me that to be a great artist one must be a great man in the sense of being a good one”(‘TU’ 270). Reversing the roles or positions of power, as the model, she surveys his artist’s pose, and repositions him. His position – which he had hoped would express “good natured tolerance of one of the whimsical sex struggling with a certain amount of impatience carefully controlled” (‘TU’ 271) – an

attitude of masculine superiority, is transformed by her perspective into evidence of a masculine economy of excess, a gluttony which does not know healthy balance:

‘You live too well, you know [...] There is a certain largeness in your very utterance which bespeaks high feeding and an oleo-saccharine quality in the courtly urbanity even of your every-day manner which comes of constant repletion. [...] You’re not an artist. You’ve eaten all that out of yourself’ (‘TU’ 271).

This sublimation of sexual energy into artistic production has long been associated with the (male) genius; the social purist deploys it in order not to refute the association but to transfigure it into an economy of purity, as opposed to the physical sensation seeking of the Decadents. Reproducing the dichotomy which separates soul from senses, for Grand the most crucial of the appetites which she denounces is the immoral sexual. The woman remarks, “it was the Tree of Life to which I alluded. You cannot pretend that you only nibble at that! [...] You have fed your senses to such a monstrous girth that they have crowded the soul out of you” (‘TU’ 272). Creative productivity, as opposed to an unhealthy, even pathological, barrenness, in life as in art, is crucial to Grand’s theory as an extension of her pronatalism, as Angelique Richardson has suggested of the eugenicism in Grand’s fiction.¹¹

Attention to an instance of doubling in the text allows insight into how Grand’s idea of cultural production here is sustained by aristocratic, not democratic structures. When the painter first meets the woman, believing her to be a humble model, he thinks to show her his painting in the belief that “a man in my position might, without loss of dignity, *give the*

poor creature a treat” (‘TU’ 268, my emphasis). The painter’s elevated ideas of his status and brilliance are challenged by the woman throughout, and instead of humbly appreciating this favour from a master, she openly scorns the painting. Yet the same phrase is used by the woman later when relating an anecdote which relies on a similar structure of power along class lines. Showing some of her private collection of ancient and modern art at her ancestral mansion to her “*pet* frame-maker at home”, she explains, “we thought *we would give him a treat*, so we took him into the picture gallery” (‘TU’ 273, my emphasis).

Incapable of appreciating the soul of the paintings, this manual labourer is moved only to remark upon the one frame which he recognises himself to have made. Thus the muse makes an analogy with the painter whom she deplores as only interested in the technicality of the medium, not the message. It is an unflattering comparison which relies on placing the artist alongside the artisan; neither can see beyond a gross materialism. The artist’s action of “treating” a supposed inferior, paternalistically, to a glimpse of high culture is repeated here in the woman’s actions toward her staff. This repetition of power structures, which are criticised when relating to gender, but kept in place for class, suggests that this New Woman would not democratise art, but would assume the commanding position hitherto held by men.

The theory of art for art’s sake is, for Bourdieu, the “*fundamental law* of the field”,¹² therefore we can expect it to have a multiplicity of formations. In the didacticism of her social-purity feminism, Grand insists upon the spiritual dimension of life which art should represent; her belief is in the sincerity, even transparency, of art and style. Yet in her ridiculing the working-class figure of the artisan through the eyes of the aristocratic muse

she also aims at the symbolic profit of the law of “art for art’s sake”, in the sense of its “purity” as the work of the “pure artist”.

Rita S. Kranidis has argued that there is a clear critical distinction between the aesthetic and political ideology in Grand’s novels and in her fiction in journal publication, using as an example the short story, ‘Janey: A Humble Administrator’,

[n]owhere do we see in “Janey” or in the other characterisations for mass consumption in the series the critical insights evidenced in Grand’s novels. Nowhere is the New Woman evident in these works, either in the heroines or in the narration. Furthermore “Janey” betrays and negates Grand’s politically sophisticated view of literary aesthetics as expressed in the novel *The Beth Book* [...] by utilizing conventional and classist conceptions of literature’s function.¹³

She reproduces assumptions that texts for the mass consumption, which she equates here with the journal market must necessarily be apolitical or “false” expressions of the author’s beliefs, and that only the novel – a “higher” form – can be authentic (despite the novel also being a product for mass consumption). I suggest that the ideas about “high” and “low” art forms and sentiments about class expressed in ‘Janey’ are certainly to be found elsewhere in Grand’s fiction. ‘The Undefinable’, as a text first published in a collection, offers a clear refutation of this argument in its expression of classist notions about art.

Ann Heilmann’s reading of Grand’s representation of “genius” here as “the quality that combines reflection and conceptual thought with a caring ethic, aesthetic imagination with ardent political purpose”¹⁴ is problematic, as I have argued; it is a paternalistic “caring

ethic” and it is not built on a democratic basis, but an hierarchical one. There is, possibly, an “ardent political purpose”, but it is certainly not a progressively radical one. Rather, Grand subscribes to a bourgeois individualism, repeating the same morality and values of the master, hegemonical structure which excludes the possibility of class mobility and has no place for radical politics. The “caring ethic” is restricted to the confines of disciplinary discourses of social purity in the management of the body, those which express concern for a healthy, non-sensuous art – rather than one of the establishment “fleshy school” or Decadent, one of Grand’s chief targets.

Despite the New Woman’s rigorous moral proscriptions, genius remains “undefinable”, an elusive quality which bespeaks an artistic autonomy apart from the vulgarity both of bourgeois markets, and of the massed working-class artisan. Whilst this allegory is ostensibly about male art, it is also about empowering the female through a positive re-evaluation of femininity. The criticism of the sensibility of the mass through the figure of the male worker displaces the popular, pejorative association of the feminine with the mass culture which the masculinity of modernism was making, as Andreas Huyssen has argued: “the gendering of an inferior mass culture as feminine goes hand in hand with the emergence of a male mystique in modernism (especially painting).”¹⁵

In chapter 6, I examined the relationship between the child and the “genius” in *The Beth Book*. In my discussion of *The Beth Book* here, I will briefly consider the way Beth’s “genius” is situated in relation to the commercial considerations of Grub Street. Beth’s “genius” is diffuse; it is not restricted to being a literary talent; indeed, she writes only one book, and a couple of articles for periodicals. She finally finds her greatness lies not in writing, but in speaking and teaching; a report of her oratory in the newspaper states “[a]

great teacher has arisen among us, a woman of genius –”(BB 527), a report which Beth responds to with appropriate feminine modesty: “burning with a kind of shame”(BB 527). She does some public speaking, but her talent seems to lie in a more nebulous notion of brilliance which is associated with her visionary quality, both as a feminist, and as a representative of the coming “race” of women. We learn that the papers call her “a woman of genius”, her contemporaries, “a leader of the people” and that “[s]he was strange to the race when she arrived, and uncharitably commented upon; but now the type is known, and has ceased to surprise”(BB 527). The significance of her genius lies in her legacy as an historic subject through the transmission of cultural values of feminist empowerment enacted in her lifetime achievements, particularly through the connection we make between the fictional Beth and the real Sarah Grand. For this history of the personality gauges that celebrity and her role in the era of the New Woman, and in her ontogenic legacy of genius – that which she will transmit through heredity – which implies a more enduring temporal dimension.

Whilst Beth’s achievement of stylistic originality, integrity and literary innovation is valued – “a method and manner of her own”(BB 423) – as part of a feminist aesthetic, Grand also endorses the high and low art dichotomy within contemporary debates of a hierarchisation of journalistic writing and literary art, thereby reproducing prevailing, patriarchal values about the equation of literary success with a loss in true cultural capital. The wholesome art of her individual, New Woman manner, save her from the fate of the writer who produces art for art’s sake. As Ideala in *The Beth Book* remarks sensationally, “works of art for art’s sake, and style for style’s sake, end on the shelf much respected,

while their authors end in the asylum, the prison and the premature grave”(BB 460). The source of degeneracy here is clearly the Aesthete.

The figure of the struggling “genius” author in hallowed seclusion, writing only when seized with inspiration, an organic instinct battling against the industrial strictures of the marketplace, which has its apotheosis in the figure of Edwin Reardon, the impoverished but brilliant writer in George Gissing’s *New Grub Street* (1891), receives some endorsement in Beth’s characterisation. We learn that “Beth had been born to be a woman, but circumstances had been forcing her to become a career”(BB 493), oppositions which polarise femininity and work into conventional binaries. The repudiation of society’s laurels and of material gain so contradictory to the aims of true art, vindicates the woman writer, especially the autobiographer, from being unwomanly; from seeking to gain approbation and recognition. Beth later remarks, “ ‘[n]othing worth doing in art is done by calculation’ ”(BB 521). By designating Beth’s acts of literary production and public speaking, seen as a particularly odious and disreputable activity for Victorian women in the culture, as instinctual and spontaneous, Grand capitulates to cultural hegemony on women’s role in public spheres. Personal ambition in such a professional capacity would be both egotistical and antithetical to the sympathies of a high thinker:

[s]he had no amateur impatience to appear in print and become known. The thought of production induced her to delay and do her utmost rather than to make indiscreet haste; her delight was in the doing essentially; she was not one to glory in public successes, however great, or find anything but a tepid satisfaction therein compared to the warm

delight that came when her thoughts flowed, and the material world melted out of mind (*BB* 453).

Making achievements in her career must be tempered with a self-effacing modesty appropriate not only to a woman, but to the true artist, for whom consideration of the vulgar dictates and rewards of the literary market would be anathema; “ ‘I don’t think mere literary success would satisfy me. I have tasted enough of that to know what it would be – a sordid triumph, a mere personal thing’ ” (*BB* 520). From this unworldly stance, her energies are turned out towards the woman’s movement and a collective feminist enterprise. Even if Grand’s ostensible purpose in writing her novels was polemic, rather than aesthetic, I have demonstrated that a portrayal of the female artistic genius which gives her cultural legitimacy, necessitates an engagement with the literary values of “high art”.

In the following I will explore the presentation of “genius” in Mona Caird’s *The Daughters of Danaus*, focusing on the ways in which she uses ideas from evolutionary sciences as they are appropriated by cultural discourse to construct this identity. In late Victorian culture, genius, as the apex of its artistic greatness is connected with notions of “race” and I will consider how beliefs in cultural and racial origins are exercised in the interests of a national literary tradition and toward consolidation of English modernity. For Caird, the representation of the marginality of the Celt, and French culture act as a foil to an Englishness associated with the Philistinism of the bourgeoisie.

Ann Heilmann (2000) has argued that, as with the representation of the female protagonist as failed artist in other New Woman realist texts which are plotted onto the “male” genre of the *Künstlerroman*, Caird’s explanation of Hadria’s failure to make a

brilliant career as a composer and musician, shares in the belief that the heroine is “predestined to fail precisely because she has the making of an artist: deep feeling and a capacity for infinite absorption.”¹⁶ The notion of the artist as an essentially tragic figure, doomed to struggle in a mercenary world because of a heightened, spiritual sensibility is one which clearly offers a cache of cultural value to the female author writing in this genre. In the game of cultural legitimacy in the field of literary production – what Bourdieu calls “the economic world reversed” – losing is winning because failure to make economic success has its compensations in cultural capital; the “winners” may be those who make the least economic profit but secure the greatest literary reputation. Yet for Caird the central conflict for the protagonist of her *Künstlerroman* which leads to tragic failure, is between private and public roles; the demands which Hadria’s personal life make determine her professional achievements. That loss can never be fully recouped as cultural capital for the feminist artist, for when women’s history of genius suggests she has never enjoyed such success, how can it be disavowed?

Critics have examined the ways in which Caird engages with evolutionary discourses in order to discuss women’s opportunities in *The Daughters of Danaus* (DD) but with different conclusions as to the ends to, and effectiveness with which she writes. My discussion will specifically focus on how Caird’s handling of “genius” is interrelated to heredity and “race” in relation to social opportunity and suggest that ambiguity arises where these two strands are undifferentiated.

Sally Ledger (1997), Ann Heilmann (2000) and Angelique Richardson (2001) have noted that Caird’s identity is unusual in late nineteenth-century feminism in opposing the more dominant voice of social purity feminism, and have discussed Caird’s prominent

engagement with evolutionism. Ledger argues that “by contesting the logic of evolutionism in its own terms, Mona Caird’s challenge in *The Daughters of Danaus* is from its inception radically limited”.¹⁷ However, she suggests that this is “by no means to say [...] that the novel is simply acquiescent to the language of the dominant discourse.”¹⁸ Ledger highlights how Caird critiques theories of natural selection and “fitness”, but finds the novel to be overly deterministic; she concludes ; “finally – Hadria (and I think, too, Caird) is intellectually defeated by the evolutionist discourse which she here attacks so effectively.”¹⁹ The field of evolutionism is constructed from various competing interpretations of its laws, which are in turn, conflicting – not just hegemonic and counter-hegemonic positions. Caird’s aim is I suggest, not only to contest the logic of evolutionism, but to perform an interrogation which enables engagement with it on productive terms. Caird actively reappropriates, and invests new meanings in the narratives she derives from evolutionary scientific theories.

Richardson has noted the “homogenizing response to the New Woman” which has grouped Mona Caird with Sarah Grand and other of the New Women writers who promoted eugenic arguments; Richardson argues instead that Caird is an anti-eugenicist writer whose plots deliberately expose the social constructedness of biological discourse, a conclusion with which I am in agreement. In order to show Caird’s difference from eugenic and social purity feminists, she argues that Caird presents the effects of the environment as more strongly deterministic than those of heredity, but this critical distinction forces the two terms into a false dichotomy. When Richardson argues that Mrs Fortescue’s sexual preference for brutish, domineering men is “born of imitation rather than heredity”,²⁰ and similarly, that for any individual’s self-development, “[p]ast and present *example* was thus

much more influential than genealogical make-up”,²¹ her analysis does not admit the way in which Caird draws on, and later develops in her essays, a narrative of organic memory which intimately fuses heredity with environment. Although Caird challenges biological determinism the transmission between generations she represents is not “cultural and social rather than biological”,²² but a thoroughly Lamarckian sense of the socio-biological which does not separate the two influences but blends them, often seamlessly, together.

Richardson’s distinguishing between the social and biological imposes a critical distinction, amounting to a dichotomy which may be apparent only in Caird’s later thought, or even in our own time. It is my contention that Caird’s use of hereditarian discourses in this novel is less ideologically coherent, and more ambivalent than Richardson argues, and my discussion will examine how Caird mobilises the scientific construction of “race” at work in the character of the Celtic “genius”, a representation which has distinctly racist origins.

Alice Mona Caird (1854-1932) was a radical New Woman – and aesthetic – writer and campaigner who led debates on marriage,²³ vivisection and other feminist issues, and was involved in the intellectual life of London society. Caird’s radical cultural relativism was powerfully voiced in her article on ‘Marriage’ in the *Westminster Review* in 1888, and developed in her women’s history, *The Morality of Marriage and Other Essays on the Status and Destiny of Woman* (1897). In this book she makes the construct of Nature her primary subject for attack, yet aims to bring women under the rubric of evolution:

[women] are treated as if they alone were exempt from the influences of natural selection, of the well-known effects upon organs and aptitudes of continued use or

disuse – effects which every one has exemplified in his own life, which every procession proves, and which is freely acknowledged in the discussion of all questions except those in which woman forms an important element.²⁴

The essays treat “nature” and natural behaviour as a cultural construction; in particular, Caird protests against the use of terms like “human nature” and “woman’s nature” which she identifies as historically radically variable because they have a plastic, “limitless adaptability”.²⁵ Although her conceit in which a chained, but docile, dog whose “nature has adapted itself to the misfortune of captivity”, represents the way in which women have accepted their domestic and social servitude, she argues for a more fluid account of human behaviour and human nature. She optimistically states that “[w]e discover that ‘human nature’ need not be a perpetual obstacle to change, to hope, and to progress, as we have hitherto persistently made it; but that it is the very instrument or material through which that change, that hope, and that progress may be achieved.”²⁶ Caird lays stress on development, gradual evolution in response to environmental pressures rather than a determinist, Galtonian approach which posits innate qualities, which, due to the unmodifiability of germplasm, cannot be changed.

Caird cites the French psychologist Thèodule A. Ribot’s Lamarckian thesis *Heredity: A Psychological Study of its Phenomena, Laws, Causes and Consequences* (1873) as an authoritative theory of the law of evolution, to support a scientific melioristic vision of female emancipation: “‘[e]ducation is the sum of habits’ [...] This then, is the theory upon which reader and writer must agree, for the sake of argument. It is, in fact, the theory of evolution.”²⁷ Ribot argued that heredity acts by way of transmitting the

accumulation of experience of the action and reaction of the individual with their surroundings, thus the degeneration of a culture or nation could be explained through organic causes:

[t]his process of decay may at first be of no moment, but heredity transmits it to the next generation, from that to the following one [...] Here, then, heredity is only an indirect cause of degeneration, the direct cause being the action of the environment, by which term we understand all action from without – not only climate and mode of life, but also manners, customs, religious ideas, institutions and laws, which often are very influential in determining the degeneration of a race.²⁸

Ribot's emphasis on the effects of the environment on the individual as the sum of detrimental pressures impacting to form a biological inheritance which was yet not necessarily innate or "natural", clearly appealed to Caird as an explanation of the degeneration of women's morale and physique which also allowed political manoeuvre for arguing the efficacy, and urgency, of women's agency in changing their course. However, this change would come only through gradual evolution, not revolution. This theory allowed her to demonstrate the importance of environment, reinforced through the mechanism of heredity, without having to succumb to the determinism of eugenic constructs of heredity. Caird wanted to use the modern idiom of science to make the firm association between feminism and intellectual modernity; by presenting her feminist beliefs within this framework, the cultural authority of this discipline could be conferred upon them. We will see later also how her use of a particular interpretation of science from

within a largely male, literary field, expresses a solidarity which bids for certain cultural capital.

In the opening pages of Mona Caird's third novel, *The Daughters of Danaus* (1894), the heroine Hadria Fullerton and her siblings in their debating society, the Preposterous Society, discuss the claim of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) which will be the linchpin of the novel: artistic power will out and prove itself, whatever the given circumstances. Hadria argues:

'let us put the question shortly thus: Given (say) great artistic power, given also a conscience and a strong will, is there any combination of circumstances which might prevent the artistic power (assuming it to be of the highest order and strength) from developing and displaying itself, so as to meet with general recognition? [...] There seem to me to be a thousand chances against it', Hadria continued. [...] 'There is nothing to prove that thousands have not been swamped by maladjustment of character to circumstance, and I would even go so far as to suggest that perhaps the very greatest of all are those whom the world has never known, because the present conditions are inharmonious with the very noblest and the very highest qualities' (*DD* 11).

Unlike Vernon Lee's adaptable "genius", for Caird, genius will not "out"; those "mute, inglorious Miltons" are specifically female. Like the chained dog who no longer reacts wildly to his cruel treatment, the "woman of genius" can be stifled, her self-expression curbed by long continued neglect or oppression. Like Virginia Woolf's "sister of

Shakespeare”, the evidence for female genius is hard to prove for she has had few successes:

‘[y]ou have the easier cause to champion’, she said, when there was a momentary lull, ‘for all your evidences can be pointed to and counted; whereas mine, poor things – pale hypotheses nameless peradventures – lie in forgotten churchyards – unthought of, unthanked, untrumpeted, and all their tragedy is lost in the everlasting silence’(DD 13).

As the narrative will chart, Hadria is denied the possibility of sustaining a demanding career because she sacrifices herself to her duties as a daughter, mother and wife, and her musical “genius” as composer and pianist will be unknown to the world.

In her talented female composer and musician Hadria, Caird’s portrayal challenged scientific pronouncement on sexual difference. In his survey of all artistic fields in *Man and Woman*, Havelock Ellis found music to be one in which women’s achievements most fell short of men’s, despite being the one where women had the greatest opportunity:

[t]he players of music have often been women; the makers of music have nearly always been men. Unless we include two or three women of our own day whose reputation has perhaps been enhanced by the fact that they are women, it is difficult to find the names of women even in the list of third-rate composers.²⁹

He found that “[m]usic is at once the most emotional and the most severely abstract of the arts. There is no art to which women have been more widely attracted, and there is certainly no art in which they have show themselves more helpless”.³⁰ Ellis cites Rubenstein on women in his *Music and its Masters*: “ [i]t is a mystery why it should be music, the noblest, most beautiful, refined, spiritual and emotional product of the human mind that is so inaccessible to woman, who is a compound of all those qualities; all the more as she has done great things in the other arts, even in the sciences”.³¹ Ellis thus found to hand here a physiological explanation like that which was deployed in the field of poetry in the discussion of New Woman poets, and which I discuss at length in chapter 5. Women *were* emotion, so they could not critically or formally articulate or express emotion.

To support this belief, Ellis cites George P. Upton from *Woman in Music* (1880) who claimed that:

woman does not reproduce [emotions] musically because she herself is emotional by temperament and nature [...] She lives in emotion, and acts from emotion ... Man controls his emotions, and can give an outward expression of them. In woman they are the dominating element and so long as they are dominant she absorbs music.³²

The reason that women did not succeed in expressing any musical “genius”, was, for Mona Caird, not for any biological reason of sexual difference, but because of the sources of oppression on woman’s personal, and professional integrity, and the demands of family to maintain women’s entrenched position in domestic roles. In a society where sacrifice is the keynote of femininity, the demands made by the mother – in turn, a result of her own self

sacrifice of her interests and pursuits for bringing up her family and care of her husband – will be revisited upon the daughters of the next generation. Despite favourable heredity, Hadria's authentic Celtic genius ultimately succumbs to the negative aspects of heredity; the weight of years of female submissiveness win out.

Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth suggest that the interest in phrenology in Victorian Britain had begun to receive criticism from the mid-century in medical circles,³³ although its influence persisted until the end of the century. Caird incorporates a phrenological model for diagnosing character – as Charlotte Brontë had done so extensively in her first novel *The Professor* (1857) – in her treatment of Mr and Mrs Fullerton's physiognomies:

[h]is face was that of a hard thinker; the head was fine in form, the forehead broad and high; the features regular, almost severe [...] Mrs Fullerton, though *also obviously above the average of humanity*, shewed signs of incomplete development. The shape of the head and brow promised many faculties that the expression of the face did not encourage one to expect (*DD* 32).

The superior heredity of Hadria's parents is dwelt upon as influences on their daughters which are conditioned, or in Mrs Fullerton's case, overpowered by the stultifying conditions of middle-class respectability: "[t]he inborn strength and authenticity of the parents had transmuted itself in the younger generation, to a spirit of free enquiry, and an audacity of thought which boded ill for Mrs Fullerton's ambitions" (*DD* 34). Professor Fortescue, hero-worshipped by Hadria, and the most intellectually authoritative character in

the book, tells her, “[y]ou have peculiar advantages of a hereditary kind, if only you can get a reasonable chance to use them. I have unbounded faith in the Fullerton stock, it has all the elements that ought to produce powers of the highest order”(DD 107). The endorsement Caird gives to the idea of hereditarily superior “stock” in producing ability is equal with that given to the other factors, not only of social circumstance, but of random chance. As the novelist, Valeria Du Prel believes of Hadria’s talents:

There appeared to be more here than mere heredity could account for. But science had never solved this problem; originality seemed always to enter upon its career, uncaused and unaccountable. It was ever a miraculous phenomenon [...]. Still the heritage was rich enough, in this case. Heredity might have some discoverable part in the apparent marvel. Each member of the Fullerton family had unusual ability of some kind (DD 58).

The deterministic elements of the discourse of heredity in this novel are tempered through the author’s treatment of the Darwinian tenet of chance. When the great Jouffroy pronounces her to be a “genius”, Hadria reflects that her ability is a gift from Nature: “[a]s well might the chance occur to one of Nature’s children as to another”(DD 317). This is not only a feminine gesture of self-deprecation; chance makes the structure of “genius” democratic.

Many evolutionists had difficulty accepting the philosophical implications of Chance. Grant Allen, for example, writing on Weismann’s recent discovery of the continuity of the germplasm in his article ‘Idiosyncrasy’ in *Mind* (1883), finds that

“spontaneous variation” was “practically unthinkable” and a “palpable absurdity”,³⁴ because it undermined an evolutionary teleology in general, and more specifically, the efficacy of eugenic practices. Allen protests against the ideological implications of the “accidental” nature of this theory that “one creed makes the man depend mainly upon the accidents of molecular physics in a colliding germ-cell and sperm-cell: the other creed makes him depend mainly upon the doings and gains of his ancestors, as modified and altered by himself.”³⁵ Which was a preferable “truth” was clear to Allen; the exercise of the will, the moral imperative to self-improvement, could not easily be relinquished for chance and the lack of agency that Weismann’s – and, originally, Darwin’s – tenet implies. Thus Allen promotes a Spencerian incremental function on Lamarckian principles, making the outcome of sexual selection under eugenics more predictable.

Despite Caird’s interest in the evolutionary tenet of chance, the characterisation of the Fullerton family suggests that the author’s empathy still lies with those she feels to be innately superior in heredity. Hadria comments of those with whom her sister Algitha is doing philanthropic work, she “can’t believe, for instance, that among all those millions in the East End, not *one* man or woman, for all these ages, was born with great capacities, which better conditions might have allowed to come to fruition”(DD 462). But rather than being further evidence of the emphasis which Caird places upon the environment in determining individual and societal development, as Angelique Richardson suggests, in placing emphasis on the “one” (although her example is somewhat hyperbolic) Caird actually reinforces the way in which this group is held to be unable to produce genius. Moreover, Algitha’s success story is highly marginal to the plot, reinforcing where Caird’s interest: the fate of the individual artist of the upper classes, lies.

Hadria's Northern musical genius belongs to a specific discourse on "race". This "genius" is a discursive formation of the late nineteenth-century literary movement of what William Sharp, one of its leaders, termed the "Celtic Renaissance", and Caird uses it to convey the regenerative power of the feminist, female genius. Although ostensibly a New Woman writer, her deployment of genius, I suggest, illustrates her allegiance to aesthetic literary values and techniques. It also demonstrates the valency with which the racial construct of the genius could be used; in the context of British colonialism in Ireland, Caird's positive evaluation of Celtic cultures can be seen as an anti-colonial stance. Her presentation of the French, in combination with that of the Celtic, suggests an attack on the philistinism of the British bourgeoisie, as we will see.

The construction of genius in science was becoming increasingly subjected to analysis of "race", although scientific opinions on the mixing of "race" in producing "genius" differed. In his book *A Study of British Genius* (1904), Havelock Ellis uses John Beddoe's "index of nigrescence" from Beddoe's influential book *The Races of Great Britain* (1885), which classified the racial groups in the British Isles according to region, in order to map the incidence of genius nationally. Ellis used an index of pigmentation measuring dark and fair hair of individuals, but relies on data of eye colour as more reliable, based on observations of portraits in the National Portrait Gallery.

In his essay 'The Ancestry of Genius' in the *Atlantic Monthly*,³⁶ Ellis discusses the genealogy of "race" of "imaginative writers of genius", a group which Galton neglects in his study as less significant than his robustly masculine military commanders, wrestlers, and oarsmen. Ellis notes that of the twelve writers whose ancestry he studies, "not one can be said to be of pure English race, while only four or five are even predominantly

English”.³⁷ He concludes that “[w]herever [...] we find a land where two unlike races, each of a fine quality, have become intermingled and in process of fusion, there we find a breed of men who have left their mark on the world, and have given birth to great poets and artists”.³⁸ Ellis includes among his notaries the New Woman writer, Olive Schreiner, whose mixed descent (“German, English and Jewish”), he suggests, contributes to her genius. Galton, on the other hand, was ambivalent on the contribution of mixed races in producing genius although he favoured immigrants and exiles as innovators and strugglers who could impart energy to the “race”.

Notions of mixed-race ancestry in genius are explored in *The Beth Book*. Iveta Jusova in her recent reading of colonial issues in *The Beth Book* and *The Heavenly Twins* notes the implication that Beth has “cross-racial breeding”, but she simply concludes that Beth’s stronger identification with her “mysterious father [rather] than her aristocratic and more mundane English mother would seem to imply later relaxation of Grand’s attitude towards the racial and cultural hierarchy prescribed by evolutionary discourse and towards border crossings in general”.³⁹ But a closer examination of scientific attitudes toward mixed-race ancestry reveal an ambiguous picture rather than a clearly prescriptive prohibition.

Grand indicates that Beth is primed for artistic genius through signalling her racially advantageous genealogy in the first chapter of *The Beth Book*. Beth is born in Ireland, and the narrator records that her father had “European features”(BB 4) but notes that his complexion and his hair “betrayed a dark drop in him, probably African”(BB 4). Although his origins are obscure, she remarks that in “the West Indies” – a colony in which racial hierarchisation was more clearly stratified – “he would certainly have been set down as a

quadroon”(BB 4). But an ambivalence about this disclosure is evident in the assertion that there was “no record of negro blood in the family, however, no trace of any ancestor who had lived abroad”(BB 4). Such a drive toward classification would suggest that Grand had not “relaxed” her attitude toward hierarchies in evolutionary discourses. If Grand is drawing on recent scientific genealogies of genius, this racial mixture is a positive contribution to Beth’s genius. This use of “race” differs markedly from Mona Caird’s, in which the “white” Celtic functions not for its possible eugenic properties, but for the way in which it acts as a literary identity opposed to bourgeois market values.

In Grant Allen’s article ‘The Recipe for Genius’ in the *Cornhill* (1885), “genius” is seen as the result of generations of an industrial civilisation which has steadily progressed, compared to the generally low level of intelligence within the homogeneity of a “race of hunting savages”;⁴⁰ a strongly Lamarckian idea of genius as an outcome of an evolutionary gradualism. By designating it as a feature of the “higher races”, Allen precludes earlier discourses of the genius of “primitivism” which can be located in Matthew Arnold’s writing, for example. His secret “recipe” for genius is a hybridism of selective elements of heterogeneity, largely based on class difference. Allen was not interested in the way in which genius was hereditary within individual families, but in its racial identity as a product whose rising general distribution would raise the curve of national intelligence toward a fitter English “race”; therefore he can conclude that the study of the production of genius is an esoteric one, only of importance to the rare individual like Francis Galton.⁴¹ His casual, non-committal tone in this context is symptomatic of the widespread cultural acceptance given to the belief that “genius” is the apotheosis of English culture.

Stephanie Barczewski in her discussion of the rise of English Studies observes how in the late nineteenth century the construction of an English (rather than British) national culture, as part of the project of empire building, was based on a myth of Anglo-Saxon ethnicity. One of the prominent ways in which the evaluation of the national, especially literary, culture was undergoing a revision was in relation to the Celtic. Matthew Arnold had written at length about the contribution of Celtic writers to English literature in his Oxford lectures printed in the *Cornhill* (1866) and collected in *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867) which continued to be widely read later in the century. Robert J. C. Young demonstrates that Arnold, by affiliating himself to theorists of physiological and anthropological studies of “type” and “race”, had “claimed a place alongside them for the literary critic who could also play his part as a scientist of racial origins, demonstrating the spiritual or cultural origins of the English through their expression in the national literature”.⁴² Ostensibly opposed to English colonial rule of Ireland, Arnold’s identification of Celtic literature and culture with racial history pointed toward a goal of integration by, and absorption of, other nationalities into Englishness. This containment of difference was, ultimately, an advocacy of imperial control by other, more gradual means:

fusion of all the inhabitants of these islands into one homogeneous, English-speaking whole, the breaking down of barriers between us, the swallowing up of separate provincial nationalities, is a consummation to which the natural course of things irresistibly tends; it is a necessity of what is called modern civilisation.⁴³

Celtic characteristics are assessed for their use value; they represent those elements lacking in the Anglo-Saxon which would attractively round out the national character. Arnold argues of these racial characteristics: “instead of one part clashing with the other [...] so soon as we have clearly discerned what they are, and begun to apply to them a law of measure, control, and guidance, they may be made to work for our good and to carry us forward”.⁴⁴ Arnold found the brilliant Celt was hampered by his pathological tendencies from ever reaching artistic greatness or dominance:

[a]ll that emotion alone can do in music the Celt has done; the very soul of emotion breathes in the Scotch and Irish airs; but with all this power of musical feeling, what has the Celt, so eager for emotion that he has not patience for science, effected in music [...]? In poetry, again – poetry which the Celt has so passionately, so nobly loved; poetry where emotion counts for so much, but where reason, too, reason, measure, sanity also count for so much, – the Celt has shown genius, indeed, splendid genius; but even here his faults have clung to him, and hindered him from producing great works.⁴⁵

Marginalized through the domination of a long history of English imperialism, the suppression of the Welsh language, the Highland clearances, and the occupation of Ireland, the Celtic was seen as a decaying, or decayed, race. Arnold suggests their weakness in racial force, and thus political power, has grown with each new era of war and empire: “(f)or ages and ages the world has been constantly slipping, ever more and more, out of the Celt’s grasp”.⁴⁶ However, rather than only presenting them as only degenerated, he

romanticised this difference insofar as it naturalised their subordination to English sovereignty: “(s)o the sensibility of the Celt, if everything else were not sacrificed to it, is a beautiful and admirable force [...] Do not let us wish that the Celt had had less sensibility but that he had been more master of it”.⁴⁷ The Celt was imaged as liminal, outside the dominant, imperialist culture, and was reconfigured as a source of modernity. Arnold characterised the Celt as the feminine counterpart to the masculinity of the Anglo-Saxon: the Celt is “peculiarly disposed to feel the spell of the feminine idiosyncrasy; he has an affinity to it; he is not far from its secret”.⁴⁸

Caird’s presentation of Celtic genius has two aspects which closely resemble those features which Arnold had highlighted, and were being reworked by writers of the “Celtic renaissance”. Hadria’s emotional musicality signals both a mystical sensibility valuable to modernity, and more negatively, the powerlessness and madness of the Romantic genius in thrall to nature, specifically as a stimulus to atavism. The identification of women, forced to fit middle-class Victorian conventions for gender roles, with the marginalized identity of the Other, and mobilised in the criticism of bourgeois values is evident in Caird’s appropriation.

Grant Allen, eulogised by his friend William Sharp as “the most brilliant champion of the Celtic genius now living”,⁴⁹ and who had called himself a “confirmed Celtomaniac”,⁵⁰ had in his *Fortnightly Review* article ‘The Celt in English Art’ (1891) used ethnology to back up Arnoldian sentiments about the Celt. Allen celebrated the Celtic spirit in the democratic and radical movements in Britain: “[a]nybody who looks over any great list of names in any of the leading modern movements of England [...] will see in a moment that the New Radicalism is essentially a Celtic product”;⁵¹ he identified the

Teutonic English with the bourgeois, Philistine academy. His study of “ethnical characteristics”⁵² shows Celtic art to be associated with the decorative and mystic, the Teutonic with the narrative and literal; thus the Celtic comes to embody the values of aestheticism or anti-materialism, manifesting a spirituality lost to modern, English culture. Scientific understanding of “race” is central to understanding cultural innovation; Allen concludes that “(c)omparative psychology, comparative ethnography, has a claim of its own to be heard on these questions; what it says may be by no means the same as what art-criticism tells us; yet it may be true in its way for all that”.⁵³

Although Caird did not have strictly autochthonous Celtic roots – she was born on the Isle of Wight – she could claim Celtic origins and connections; her father was a Scottish inventor and she married into a distinguished Scottish family when she married James A. Henryson Caird in 1877.⁵⁴ Mona Caird would have been conversant with the work of the “Celtic Revival” movement; she was a close friend of the writer, Elizabeth Sharp⁵⁵ and her husband (who was also her cousin): the poet, William Sharp (1855-1905),⁵⁶ a leading figure in the Celtic Renaissance writing not only under his own name, but under that of the Scottish poet “Fiona Macleod”. The Sharps wrote a number of works and studies of poetry.⁵⁷ William Sharp, who endorsed Arnold’s writing on the Celt, was doubly culturally marginal in his “Scoto-Gaelic” persona as Fiona Macleod; a pose which corresponded with his identification with the “art for arts sake” movement.

In the introduction to his anthology of Celtic poetry, *Lyra Celtica* (1896), Sharp suggested that the project of collecting and publishing Celtic writing was not a commercially viable enterprise, but could only be a labour of love. His romantic claim that it was work “for which extrinsic reward is payable in rainbow-gold alone”⁵⁸ is a disavowal

so marked as to draw our attention to the considerable symbolic capital of that work in the literary field; for example Sharp had been collaborating with the scientist Patrick Geddes at Edinburgh University on the substantial business venture of a publishing company for Celtic texts in art and literature since 1894.

In a brief excursion through British “literary genius”, by drawing on notions of organic memory, William Sharp could fortuitously find that even the apparently purely English writer expressed the Celtic: “[s]o far as we know, Coleridge and Shelley are of unmixed blood, though who can say there was nothing atavistic in their ‘genius’, and that the wild lyricism of one and the glamour and magic of the other were not in part the expression of some ‘ancestral voice’?”⁵⁹; something about literary genius could be quintessentially Celtic, because the Celtic was everywhere. Race becomes essentialised; even if it is not manifest in the language any longer, it is evident in the body. In a shift from a cultural or linguistic definition of race to one which is literally physiological, and ahistorical, Sharp argued that: “[s]kulls are harder than consonants, and races lurk when languages slink away”.⁶⁰ In his theory a “Celtic brain” may be evident in an Anglo-Celtic body without kinship: “by blood, race, and birth”.⁶¹ As with Arnold, for Sharp this dislocated identity has value insofar as it features in relation to metropolitan Englishness.

The “celtomania” of William Sharp’s aestheticism is evident in Mona Caird’s writing. Lyn Pykett has commented upon Caird’s mysticism in *Pathway of the Gods* (1898), which she identifies as a fin-de-siècle mysticism that demonstrates an aesthetic self-consciousness in its use of ahistoricism; uses which are a precursor to modernist concerns, such as those developed by D. H. Lawrence.⁶² Caird’s treatment of the genius resembles that of the “twilight movement” which was a forerunner to modernism. Caird’s

mysticism in *Daughters* is marked in her presentation of musical genius. Hadria's ancestral memory is evoked by the Celtic dance. The "twilight genre" of the fin de siècle took as its central text W. B. Yeats's *The Celtic Twilight* (1893); Havelock Ellis characterises the crepuscular as one of the key elements of the impression which Celtic art makes upon the nineteenth-century reader:

[t]wilight has the curious property of making the scenes it envelops appear at once both near and remote. [...] *For a moment a kind of musical silence seems to fill the air; we are conscious of the presence of mystery; we feel as if we had caught a glimpse of a landscape in another world. This impression – fantastic as it may seem and yet explicable by the conditions of the atmosphere during this brief period of diffused light – very exactly corresponds to the special impression which Celtic romance makes upon us.*⁶³

The language of symbolism (shade, mystery, dream, imagination) in the presentation of such a cultural encounter corresponds to the magical vision that the Fullerton sisters share, glimpsed in the smoke from the bonfire they light in a cave, which also embodies the fin-de-siècle mysticism of symbolism:

distant lands, purple mountains, fair white cities, and wide kingdoms [...] Among those blue deeps and faint innumerable mountain-tops, caught through a soft mist that continually moved and lifted, thinned and thickened, with changing tints, all the secrets, all the hopes, all the powers and splendours of life lay hidden; and the beauty

of the vision was as the essence of poetry and of music – of all that is lovely in the world of art, and in the world of the emotions. The question that has been debated so hotly and so often, as to the relation of the good and the beautiful, art and ethics, seemed to be answered by this bewildering revelation, sunlit smoke, playing across the face of a purple-tinted rock and a few feet of grass-edged pathway (*DD* 21).

Stephanie Barczewski suggests that at the turn of the eighteenth century:

the celebration of autochthonous cultures which were perceived as free from the over-sophisticated artificiality of the modern world gradually broadened in to a flood of interest and enthusiasm for the innocent, uncorrupted, and uncivilised [...] the ancient Celtic inhabitants of the British Isles became a subject worthy of consideration and even admiration.⁶⁴

A materialist perspective on this shift reminds us that the construction of a “creator” figure in the eighteenth century, as Bourdieu suggests, came with the emergence of a bourgeois market:

those ‘inventions’ of Romanticism – the representation of culture as a kind of superior reality, irreducible to the vulgar demands of economics, and the ideology of free, disinterested ‘creation’ founded on the spontaneity of innate inspiration – appear to be just so many reactions to the pressures of an anonymous market.⁶⁵

So in *Daughters*, with its inflections of Romanticism, “race” acts as a signifier in the process of separating the symbolic object – the work of art, the musical composition – from the commodity. Unlike the dichotomy of hereditary vitality and degeneracy structured in the natures of the English urban metropolitan and the Scottish Highlands country peasant, such as that of Emma F. Brooke’s *A Superfluous Woman* (1894), Caird’s Highland Celtic genius shares in that continuity of Romanticism, featuring the Rousseauesque “primitivism” on which Arnold had drawn, of creative power, yet unstable character. She thereby taps into widely recognised representations of the “primitive” artist as dominated by an artistic impulse which expresses an innate ability that governs the temperament.

Another visionary encounter with nature renders Hadria sexually receptive to Hubert’s desire for marriage. A dominant aspect influencing Hadria’s behaviour in this episode is the surfacing of unconscious drives determined by heredity: her Celtic nature is roused by hearing the wild reels or their correlative in Nature, the wind in the pines: “the strangeness of the scene appealed to some wild instinct, and to the intense melancholy that lurks in the Celtic nature”(DD 115). She is closer to the cosmic elements which inspire and thrill her: “what vast dim possibilities lurked out there, in the hollows of the hills! What inspiration thundered in the voice of the prophet wind!” (DD 115). These make her “at one with the desperate elemental thing”(DD116).

Lyn Pykett has noted of *Pathway of the Gods* that the transition from culture into nature is one which features in the writing of other New Woman novelists, and that this shift has the critical effect of removing the “narrative from material history into the mysterious cycles of time”.⁶⁶ In *Daughters*, too, with a movement from culture into nature, Hadria’s historic subjectivity is effaced and universalised:

she felt herself caught into the heart of some vast unknown power, of which the wind was but a thrall, until she became, for a moment, consciously part of that which was universal. Her personality grew dim; she stood as it seemed, face to face with Nature, divided from the ultimate truth by only a thin veil [...] the tension of personal feeling was loosened (*DD* 116).

Here the experience of a transhistorical, racial self comes with loss of self in nature: “[i]t was not a side, an aspect of existence, but the whole of it that seemed to storm round her, in the darkness. No wonder, when the wind was let loose among the mountains, that the old Highland people thought that their dead were about them”(*DD* 116). The power of the wind, which symbolises the power of nature dominates her environs and dwarfs her and “cared nothing for the passion of a single storm”(*DD* 116). With the submission of individual protest to the storm comes the reflection that “humanity was a puny production of the Ages”(*DD* 116) with the Hardyan inflection that we are like the “struggling animalculae [...] in a drop of magnified ditch-water”(*DD* 116) with all the will and agency of those “microscopic insects”(*DD* 116) – imagery which Hardy had used with characteristic irony in *The Return of the Native* (1878).⁶⁷

A contemporary understanding of the mind and will, focused through the lens of evolutionism, held that instinctive forces of the unconscious were hidden from the conscious mind, but would express themselves through unexpected atavistic behaviours. Henry Maudsley in *Body and Will* (1883) had described the latent state of ancestral aptitudes inhering in the structure of an individual’s brain as having “representation, direct

or indirect, these are lines of ancestral resemblance which condition his modes of thinking, feeling and will – all his modes of consciousness”.⁶⁸ These motive energies of which we are not aware are “active below the threshold of consciousness”⁶⁹ and are the *causes*, rather than motives, which determine the will. Maudsley, who aimed at integrating metaphysical and psychological interpretation of will with evolutionary physiology, asked rhetorically, how

such ancestral aptitudes should exist in [the mind] for a long time in a perfectly silent or latent state, without the least consciousness on its part of their existence, and start suddenly into activity on the occasion of some unforeseen stimulus. Where are they during that latency? ⁷⁰

He stated that latent states in the brain existed within the “unconscious mind”. The body could behave in unforeseen ways which manifest symptoms of atavism; these are thus behaviours Maudsley described as being radically different from the familiar, obvious resemblances we bear to behaviours of those of immediate family, and to our usual patterns of behaviour: “[n]ow and then in everybody’s life it happens that an unforeseen impulse starting forth from the unconscious depths of his being drives him to say or do what he had not the least intention to say or do a moment beforehand”.⁷¹ In Maudsley’s account, as with other contemporary cultural narratives of atavism, unpredictable, threatening or wild behaviours were understood as arising from the unconscious and expressing ancestral patterns.

The suspension of will that Caird portrays in Hadria's dance, and the subsequent acceptance of the marriage proposal, derives its narrative effect from the question whether there can be free will on the part of the individual, because of heredity, as well as social circumstance. In part, Caird signals, this is because of societal pressures and conditions – such as Henriette Temperley's insistence to Hubert to propose again to Hadria – but Hadria's vulnerability is secured through an atavistic state. She is dancing these reels before being cornered and harassed by Hubert: “[s]ome mad spirit seemed to possess her. It would appear almost as if she had passed into a different phase of character. She lost caution and care and the sense of external events”(DD 136). Hadria's brother Ernest remarks of the music that “[i]t really seems to half mesmerise her”(DD 134), a comment which refers to a “scientific” hypnotic process on the unconscious. Of her national music she tells Hubert:

‘[i]t fills me with bewildering memories’ she said in a dreamy tone. ‘It seems to recall – it eludes description – some wild, primitive experiences – mountains, mists – I can’t express what northern mysteries. It seems almost as if I had lived before, among some ancient Celtic people, and now, when I hear their music – or sometimes when I hear the sound of wind among the pines – whiffs and gusts of something intensely familiar return to me, and I cannot grasp it. It is very bewildering’(DD 137).

This moment acts strategically in the plot to bring about the marriage which Hadria vociferously opposes; the development of the individual is overdetermined by heredity.

The presentation of the Celt as weak, and prey to the controlling influences of stronger, political and cultural powers – in this instance, the patriarchal injunction to marriage – is inflected in this episode. I use this example not to argue for the fatalism of the relationship between heredity and unconscious will as more significant factors than cultural ones in the presentation of individual destiny here, but rather to highlight the way in which this discourse is deeply embedded in Caird's presentation of evolutionary scientific ideas, and to argue for an ambiguity at the heart of a particular discourse of "racial" genius which Caird deploys.

The critique of the philistinism of the ruling Anglo-Saxon classes and their oppression of women, is also evident in Caird's sympathetic portrayal of the French. In France, Hadria's genius might be truly recognised and nurtured. The "great Jouffroy" has enlightened, feminist views of women's abilities, and is the key figure who encourages Hadria in her musical career.

Other French colleagues pronounce of Hadria's score: " '[t]here is genius in that work, but certainly genius' "(DD:315) and a friend agrees, "[i]t ought to be published, she said. But this supreme recompense of genius was apparently hard to achieve"(DD 315). When Monsieur Thillard hears Hadria play he finds a mystery in the music: "[h]e could not quite understand it. There was, he knew not what, in it, of strange and powerful; a music of the North; something of bizarre, something of mysterious, even of terrible, '*une emotion épouventable*' "(DD 314). Yet it is also described as modern and avant-garde; it was "a new language to casual listeners. It was rebel music, offensive to the orthodox"(DD 321). The comments express recognition of the combination of qualities in the Celtic

discussed above, and identify the French with the cultural heterodox whose avant-gardism can recognise the true artist.

Hadria must write articles to make a living, because the musical work does not pay; thus the rejection of bourgeois aesthetics is made by “positing the unique products of ‘creative genius’ against interchangeable products, utterly and completely reducible to their commodity value”.⁷² The musician cannot be located so easily within the debates over the role of art; as a “purer” form without the cultural referentiality of literary forms, music is more closely fitted to “art for art’s sake”. The coding of women’s cultural production as mass culture is challenged by Caird in which the female inhabits the place of individual artistic genius normally reserved for men. The French are sympathetic to Hadria’s genius – not only perhaps because of their Celtic roots through the Breton, an aspect of French racial identity which featured in William Sharp’s account – but their affinity with her music and her aims connote an anti-establishment, anti-bourgeois feeling which opposes everything which Hadria (and Caird) wish to leave behind. Mobilising the identification of the French with radicalism, this construct of “race” can act to define the true, non-materialistic artist in a similar way to that of the Celtic. At the same time as she attacked the “respectability” of Englishness to reveal its misogynist laws and culture, Caird consolidated a feminist marginality and artistic autonomy through “race”, positively evaluating “racial” influences outside the English.

Caird’s treatment of the Parisian cultural context and French mentor have a critical role which contrasts with Grand’s attitude to the French. In *The Beth Book*, Galbraith, the sympathetic, and authoritative voice of the doctor who had featured in the *Heavenly Twins*, is a mentor to Beth in her career. He remarks of French novelists:

If France is to be judged by the tendency of its literature and art at present, one would suppose it to be dominated and doomed to destruction by a gang of lascivious authors and artists who are sapping the manhood of the country and degrading the womanhood by idealising self-indulgence and mean intrigue (*BB* 367).

Critics have accounted for the expulsion of the French novel in such English texts as part of the imperial project of consolidating the national culture. Teresa Mangum suggests that in her references to French novels in *The Beth Book*, Grand “plays on the English sense of *national* superiority to foreigners by aligning her work with ‘Britishness’ ”.⁷³ Richardson argues more strongly that Grand’s aims express an explicit imperialist racism: “French literature was a metonymic figuring of racial impurity; the English novel had to be purged of such damaging racial influences before it could serve the British empire”.⁷⁴

The moral values of Beth’s writing project are frequently distinguished from those of French literature which is associated with naturalism, decadence, symbolism and aestheticism. The cultural invasion of these forms in the English literary market-place constitute a threat of contamination to the purity of the English novel promised by feminist writers. Late nineteenth-century debates on literary value and national culture take on a dialogic form between Beth and her former childhood friend, Alfred Cayley Pounce, who as an adult has been corrupted by a patriarchal, Decadent art-world and the immorality it fosters. As an aspiring stylist who is a reviewer for the fictive journal the *Patriarch*, in Pounce’s characterisation a critique of patriarchy is enacted through an attack on the art of the Decadents – synonymous here with the dominant, or high culture – on the grounds of

their sensuality and the apoliticism of their preoccupation with style. Pounce, (whose surname belies the ineffectiveness of his sexually predatory behaviour) has a fondness for lilies and orchids that betrays his effeminate aesthete tendencies. His corrupt morals are expressed in his wish that Beth be George Sand to his Alfred de Musset, a relationship which combines a personal morality with a French aesthetic of which Grand does not approve. Beth persistently rejects the preoccupations of style in fiction as socially and morally irresponsible: “[m]anner has always been less to me than matter. When I think of all the preventable sin and misery there is in the world, I pray God give us books of good intention – never mind the style!” (BB 460) an expostulation which leaves the reader in no doubt of the author’s didactic principles. As I have indicated in chapter 2, although the New Woman writers had benefited from the way in which French writers had opened up the way for writing about sexual relations and representing sexuality in fiction, for the moral purity feminist that Grand was, this debt was to be fervently disavowed if she was to distance her ethical project from the degeneracy and sexual permissiveness associated with the French in the mind of the reading public.

Whether as a rhetorical exchange such as the authorially sanctioned protests of Beth against the aesthetics and ethics of the Decadents, or through the impress of modernist values of Romantic genius in Caird’s use of the Celtic, New Woman writing is always produced through its contiguity with other fields the exertion of whose influence is indicated in the author’s negotiations with these cultural economies. Cultural and aesthetic command was essential even in the most polemical novels. Kranidis misrepresents Caird’s intentions when she claims that “in an argument similar to Grand’s, [*The Daughters of Danaus*] once again presents a critique of aesthetic ideology as a precursor to social

critique [and] aims to address the question of aesthetic value by revealing the High/Low cultural judgements permeating late Victorian aesthetic ideology".⁷⁵ Although Caird argues that the artist is a social being and demonstrates the way in which gender ideologies prevent women's career success and condemn them to inactivity under conditions of unequal opportunity, she nevertheless still keeps in place some "high" cultural judgements in her notions of artistic genius. It is necessary to unpack the notions of late Victorian aesthetic ideology here, and examine it as I have done in discussion of the Celtic Renaissance. Caird's use of the Celtic, drawn from the protomodernist Twilight and Celtic Renaissance movements suggests that nineties' aesthetic discourse was not wholly exclusivist or closed to feminist participation and appropriation.

The genius was an important figure in contesting and reifying notions of Englishness and national culture. In Beth's success the female genius is a hopeful female figure of national, cultural (and biological) regeneration. Whilst Beth's own "racial" genealogy as genius is undecided, her opinions as a poet or spokeswoman on the role of great literature and culture act to reify a moral, "pure" Englishness. The eugenic, biological essentialism which underlies Grand's "genius", may be why she portrays Beth as a success.

In order to register the terrible loss to society and to the individual with a greater impact, Caird's female genius, through her subordination to the values of society as a woman, tragically fails. Scientific constructions of this subjectivity underlie both. By contrast, Caird retains the ambiguity of a scientifically inflected genius; atavistic patterns of behaviour complicate Hadria's path to progress, but these are also significant in endowing her with authentic, innate genius. Caird's treatment of Hadria's future hopes in France – a sign of cultural modernity and radicalism – signals an identification with the French avant-

garde which strengthens her critique of the patriarchal attitudes of philistine, bourgeois British. The Celt too stands outside these values and has a natural affinity with the feminine as a subjectivity of “racial” and cultural alterity. The politicising agenda of feminism which sought to emphasise the material and social conditions of the production of art and to oppose the aesthetic ideology in which art was separated from life, nonetheless romanticised and individualised the artistic genius through the authoritative discourses of science.

The evidence of criticism aimed at women poets – producers of “high” art – detailed in chapter 4, demonstrated the need for feminists to lay claim to the subjectivity of genius as a negotiation out of the restrictive limits in which scientific explanations of creativity and biology would circumscribe their gender; Grand and Caird were not atypical amongst feminist writers in seeking to appropriate not only cultural legitimacy for women’s artistic and intellectual status, but its apotheosis. Discussion of genius in chapter 6 explored the implications of the close and contested relations between the child, genius and degeneracy in evolutionary psychology and eugenic researches for feminist constructions of child female subjectivity; in this chapter I have shown how despite her critique of the ways in which science naturalised female oppression, Caird aimed to harness the energy of hereditarian constructs of ancestry in order to vitalise her depiction of a genius female subjectivity, bringing it into line with depictions of self and of genius in contemporary literary movements.

¹ Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Enquiry into Its Laws and Consequences* (1869; reprint second ed. 1892; Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1972): 26.

² Penny Boumelha, ‘The Woman of Genius and the Woman of Grub Street’ *English Literature in Transition* 40:2 (1997): 164-181 (172).

³ William Hirsch, *Genius and Degeneration: A Psychological Study* (London: William Heinemann, 1897): 40.

⁴ Ibid: 40.

⁵ William Hirsch, *Genius and Degeneration* (1897): 43.

⁶ *Ibid*: 45.

⁷ Vernon Lee, *Limbo and other Essays* (London: Grant Richards, 1897): 2. 09/10/99: [http://www.indiana.edu/~letrs/vwwwp/lee/limbo.html#](http://www.indiana.edu/~letrs/vwwwp/lee/limbo.html#:): 43

⁸ *Ibid*: 8.

⁹ This short story was first published in a collection: Sarah Grand, *Emotional Moments* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1908): 303-58.

¹⁰ Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First Wave Feminism* (London: Macmillan, 2000):160.

¹¹ See Angelique Richardson, 'Allopathic Pills? Health, Fitness and New Woman Fictions', *Women: A Cultural Review* 10:1 (1999):1-21.

¹² Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (1983; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993): 62.

¹³ Rita S. Kranidis, *Subversive Discourse: The Cultural Production of Late Victorian Feminist Novels* (London: Macmillan, 1995): 51.

¹⁴ Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction* (2000): 160

¹⁵ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Macmillan, 1987): 52.

¹⁶ Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction* (2000): 165.

¹⁷ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997): 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid*: 28.

¹⁹ *Ibid*: 29.

²⁰ Angelique Richardson, *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact* (London: Palgrave, 2001): 189. This reading may partly be the result of the way in which this essay recontextualises Caird's work as a whole, and thus her overview imposes a unity and ideological consistency to her work which is not wholly evident in this particular novel.

²¹ *Ibid*: 189.

²² *Ibid*: 205.

²³ Caird's article 'Marriage', published in Chapman's quarterly, *Westminster Review* (Aug. 1888) was a polemic which succeeded in exciting new debate on the topic, and was rapidly capitalised on by the *Daily Telegraph* where the column 'Is Marriage a Failure?' received some 27,000 letters. See Margaret Morganroth Gullette, Afterword, *The Daughters of Danaus* (New York: The Feminist Press 1989).

²⁴ Mona Caird, *The Morality of Marriage* (London: George Kedway, 1897): 63.

²⁵ Mona Caird, 'Marriage', *Westminster Review* (Aug. 1888): 186.

²⁶ Mona Caird, *The Morality of Marriage* (1897): 40.

²⁷ *Ibid*: 116.

²⁸ T. A. Ribot, *Heredity: A Psychological Study of its Phenomena, Laws, Causes and Consequences* (1873; London: Henry S. King, 1875): 303.

²⁹ Havelock Ellis, *Man and Woman* (1894; London: Walter Scott, 1897): 319.

³⁰ *Ibid*: 320.

³¹ *Ibid*: 320.

³² Ellis cites George P. Upton, *Woman in Music* (1880; Chicago: 1886) in *Man and Woman*: 320.

³³ See their commentary on a text by phrenologist Andrew Combe in Jenny Bourne-Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (eds.) *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998): 42.

³⁴ Grant Allen, 'Idiosyncrasy', *Mind* vol. 8 (1883): 487-505 (492).

³⁵ *Ibid*: 495.

³⁶ Havelock Ellis, 'The Ancestry of Genius', *Atlantic Monthly* (March 1893): 383-389 .

³⁷ *Ibid*: 387.

- ³⁸ Ibid: 389.
- ³⁹ Iveta Jusova, 'Imperialist Feminism: Colonial Issues in Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* and *The Beth Book*', *English Literature in Transition* 43:3 (2000): 298-315.
- ⁴⁰ Grant Allen, 'The Recipe for Genius', *Cornhill* (Oct. 1885): 406-15 (409).
- ⁴¹ Allen suggested that if we had a formula for genius it would have only academic, rather than general interest: "if one proved it in a big book, with classified examples and detailed genealogies of all the geniuses, would anybody on earth except Mr Francis Galton ever take the trouble to read it?". 'The Recipe for Genius' (1885): 415.
- ⁴² Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge 1995): 82.
- ⁴³ Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1867): 12.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid: 175. This intolerance and hostility to difference persists in the recent, Tory rhetoric of Norman Tebbit for whom multi-culturalism will weaken the culture of the English nation which he presumes to have a stable, unified and singular identity.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid: 103.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid: 107.
- ⁴⁷ Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867): 107.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid: 108.
- ⁴⁹ Letter from Fiona Macleod to Grant Allen in 1894. Elizabeth A. Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir* (London: William Heinemann, 1910): 228.
- ⁵⁰ Letter from Grant Allen to Fiona Macleod in 1894. Ibid: 229.
- ⁵¹ Grant Allen, 'The Celt in English Art', *Fortnightly Review* 55 (Feb. 1891): 267.
- ⁵² Ibid: 277.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ See Catherine J. Golden's entry on 'Alice Mona Caird' in Abigail Burnham Bloom (ed.) *A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook* (London: Aldwych Press, 2000): 99.
- ⁵⁵ Elizabeth Sharp dedicated to Caird an anthology she had edited, *Women Poets of the Victorian Era* (1890).
- ⁵⁶ Elizabeth Sharp in her biography of her husband, records that she introduced William to Mona Caird early on in their relationship: "[w]e three were friends with many tastes and interests in common, not the least being all questions relating to women. To my great satisfaction out of the meeting with my cousin there grew deeply attached friendships that lasted throughout his life": 25. Sharp also dedicated one of his short stories, 'The Sister of Compassion' to "that Sister of compassion for all suffering animals, Mrs Mona Caird". Elizabeth A. Sharp, *William Sharp (Fiona Macleod): A Memoir* (1910): 252.
- ⁵⁷ These included *Pharais: A Romance of the Isles* (1884) and *Lyra Celtica* (1896) edited by Elizabeth Sharp: <http://www.sundown.pair.com/Sharp/Lyra%20Celtica/introduction.htm>.
- ⁵⁸ William Sharp, introduction to *Lyra Celtica*: http://www.sundown.pair.com/Sharp/Lyra%20Celtica/celtica_title.html.
- ⁵⁹ William Sharp, introduction to *Lyra Celtica* (1896).
- ⁶⁰ Ibid.
- ⁶¹ Ibid.
- ⁶² Lyn Pykett calls Caird's *Pathway of the Gods* (1898) which deals with legends, a "strange and mystical novel", whose fin-de-siècle mysticism is emblematic of its use of modernist techniques. Lyn Pykett, 'The Cause of Women and the Course of Fiction: The Case of Mona Caird'. *Gender Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Literature*. Ed. Christopher Parker (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1995): 125-138 (135).
- ⁶³ H. H. Ellis, *A Study of British Genius* (1904). London: Constable and Co. Ltd, 1927: 223.
- ⁶⁴ Stephanie Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 85.
- ⁶⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) 114.
- ⁶⁶ Lyn Pykett, 'The Cause of Women and the Course of Fiction' (1995): 134.

⁶⁷ On her fatal journey to her son's home, Mrs Yeobright "came to a spot where independent worlds of ephemerons were passing their time in mad carousal [...] some in the tepid and stringy water of a nearly dried pool [...] amid which the maggoty shapes of innumerable obscure creatures could be indistinctly seen, heaving and wallowing with enjoyment. Being a woman not disinclined to philosophise she some times sat down under her umbrella to rest and to watch their happiness, for a certain hopefulness as to the result of her visit gave ease to her mind". Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (1878; London: Everyman, 1995): 271.

⁶⁸ Henry Maudsley, *Body and Will: Being An Essay Concerning Will In Its Metaphysical, Physiological and Pathological Aspects* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., 1883): 26.

⁶⁹ Ibid: 27.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 27.

⁷¹ Ibid: 28.

⁷² Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993): 314.

⁷³ Teresa Mangum, *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant: Sarah Grand and the New Woman Novel* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1998): 178.

⁷⁴ Angelique Richardson, 'Allopathic Pills? Health, Fitness and New Woman Fictions' (1999): 15.

⁷⁵ Rita S.Krandis, *Subversive Discourse* (1995): 79.

Afterword

In their vision of women as the active subjects of history, feminists countered their adversaries by reconstructing their femininity as symptomatic of the advancement of society rather than its downfall, of a progressive strengthening of national powers rather than decay. The use of over-arching narratives of growth and decay were common to British fin-de-siècle culture, but the grand narrative of modernity as progress is now unsustainable. Evolutionary perspectives on anthropological histories succeeded in furthering a historical consciousness which in its female-centred view of human development and models of female agency was crucial to giving the disenfranchised (middle-class, Western women) a place in history, exceeded the terms of male discourses.

This thesis has concentrated on key areas of scientific debate and their treatment in literary and other cultural representations of gender and modernity: the relationships between health, fitness and beauty, biological economies of the body, and the multiple aspects of eugenicism such as hereditary theories of genius and degeneration. By returning to these themes in different chapters I have also sought to make connections, identify resemblances and contrasts between otherwise discrete texts in different literary fields in order to explore the ways in which ideological positions are not always consistent between feminist authors of the 1890s.

New Woman writers did not restrict themselves to the literary form of the novel in order to communicate their feminist agendas; I chose to discuss polysemic texts which generate ideological ambiguities which might problematise the identity of the New Woman and her relation to the new sciences. The degree of intellectual exchange between the disciplinary fields of science and literature in the nineteenth century, as Gillian Beer

(1983;1996) and George Levine (1987) amongst others have argued, can generate further development of ideas as different readers or audiences produce new terms through appropriation of texts. If feminist writers' deployment of scientific vocabularies generated enabling ideological and intellectual instabilities it was also often highly ambiguous and ambivalent, thus making its effectiveness questionable.

Tracking the rubric of hygiene and its entanglement in ideas of eugenic fitness across feminist periodicals illustrates both the diversity of strands of socio-political thought among women at this period and the extent to which these discourses jostled amongst each other producing affinities and solidarities between groups. A central finding has been that such multiple signifiers such as hygiene and fitness, which incorporate a number of practices, beliefs, lifestyles and interrelated discourses, have proven to be highly ambivalent. The power of such terms operates precisely through that ambivalence; with eugenics this fluidity meant that such discourses insidiously became part of a cultural repertoire of narratives of decline and degeneration in public rhetoric.

A fuller more complex picture of who the New Woman writer was, and what constituted feminist concerns and the variety of their expression and articulation, is gained by reappraisal of women writers of the 1890s who were working in fields adjacent to those of the New Woman. Although these sites of meaning and identity were differentiated – even dispersed – they were not isolated; women writers were joined together through professional and social networks of influence such as the Pioneer Club and in fields through publishing in certain “houses” such as Lane and Heinemann. To claim that New Women were more concerned about getting their political views across than in style and literary values is to be in danger of diminishing the complexity of their negotiations with the literary market. Grand hotly repudiated art in the novel and openly promoted the ethics of the purpose novel and its

polemical uses; yet the distinctions between literary values she makes in *The Beth Book* aim to elevate Beth's writing to a "purer" status than the novel's humble trade origins and, through her uses of evolutionary psychology, the author to the status of genius.

Writing of the position taking of the writer on the low form of the novel, Pierre Bourdieu remarks on the

correspondence between the hierarchy of positions (e.g. of genres and, within genres, of styles) and the hierarchy of social origins, therefore of associated dispositions [...] within the 'popular' novel which, more often than any category of novel, is abandoned to writers issuing from dominated classes and women writers, we find yet another hierarchy: literary treatments that distance themselves most from the genre or that are semi-parodic [...] are the work of relatively more privileged writers.¹

Grant Allen was unusual as a male writer of higher social origins in championing the purpose novel, a form which was associated with women, low culture, and the feminisation of culture. His use of (masculine) science was one such treatment which distanced his products from those of the mass-market genres, a disposition marking out a higher position in the hierarchy of the field. Yet women writers working within the novel also deployed techniques which distanced themselves from that genre; Caird's use of aestheticist constructs of racial genius is one example. Her use of an aestheticist construction of scientific "racial" identity in *The Daughters of Danaus* was an effect of her disposition in relation to Bourdieu's hierarchy of positions, illustrating the way in which a New Woman novelist might be situated side by side with the high-art field of the "Celtic Renaissance" or the "Twilight Movement".

In female aesthetes' texts, registers of science were negotiated; evolutionary aesthetics had a dominant place in Vernon Lee's more theoretical productions, but a playful ambivalence characterises Lee's ghost stories which she distances from the empirical documents of the SPR whose very nature is conditional on the absence of the imaginary, and renders them "spurious". The anti-realist space of the fantastic is a polyphonic one in which discourses on the relationship between beauty and fitness generate more possibilities and open-endedness than the dogmatism and extremity of the eugenic beliefs expressed by Lee elsewhere.

The cultural capital of poetry as a high culture form made women poets particularly prominent targets for male criticism. Science was viewed for example, by Constance Naden and May Kendall, as the quintessential modern idiom, and it best embodied the excitement and innovation of modernity. In their poems the science, medicine and technology of an industrialising nation were seen as a possible means of liberating its female subjects; verses dramatize women's encounter with the public sphere as doctors, biology students or mechanical inventors. Use of comic imagery to mock dichotomies of culture/nature, and a teasing critique of imperialist and patriarchal investments in narratives of decline and progress feature amongst the New Woman's poetic intervention into the scientific orthodoxies stacked against them.

What were women writers successes and failures in appropriating evolutionary scientific discourses in their efforts at self-definition? Vernon Lee suggested that late Victorian feminism too often resembled Nietzsche's model of the will to power of a slave morality:² a creative *ressentiment* giving birth to values and morals only through negative nay-saying without creating an alternative "noble" morality. Could social and moral-purity feminism in its views on sexuality be like the morality which Nietzsche argued was in need of

a hostile enemy against which to define itself – “it needs, physiologically speaking, external stimuli in order to act at all – its action is fundamentally reactive”³ – not only in its negativity, but in its repetition of the terms of the debate which privilege women’s superior, spiritual nature?

The denial of women’s sexual feelings by many New Women was an attempt to take control over women’s bodies, and can be understood in part as a practical response to the labours and dangers of childbirth and rearing, multiple pregnancies as well as the threat of venereal diseases for women at this time. But the emphasis on sexual resistance and moral purity in first-wave feminism would be replaced in the early twentieth century by a greater movement by feminists toward advocacy of contraceptive practices for the liberation of women from their reproductive capacities and the pursuit of sexual experience.

Beliefs in sexual difference took on a prominence for radicals and conservatives alike at a time of cultural and political upheaval and were integral to accounts in the new sciences. In the scramble for modernity, feminists took on such ideas about female sexual difference and the role of maternity in the service of the nation-state or “race” because this role appeared to situate them in a wider political and economic arena. It was a precarious strategy, for eugenics ultimately consigned women to the service of a greater abstract imperative than their own individual choices or reasons, or the greater participation in the public world of work. This ideology is played out in Victoria Cross’s vision of maternity in which the violence of infanticide acts decisively to configure motherhood as a role which is not for the individual woman, but explicitly in service for the imperial nation-state.

Such objectives in securing active roles for women as citizens in the fortified nation were often imbricated in the “civilising missions” of imperial feminism and in the case of Grand, Swiney and other social and moral purists, used to justify racist and imperialist

politics. These narratives were often constructed at the price of excluding women, and men, considered to be Other, through a rhetoric of miscegenation as moral and racial contamination. Could such feminism which did not see non-western women as subordinated groups with common interests or experiences of oppression ever be more than another form of imperialist ideology? Some feminists, such as Josephine Butler were capable of seeing colonised women in India as similarly sexually exploited, but for Swiney, such women simply came to occupy the space of the contaminatory sexuality of the Other, a construct which men had designated for (white) women.

The field of research on the New Woman has been ground breaking in its recovery of female authors and their fiction and has, in the theorisation of the relationship of women writers to the canon, been wary of modernist judgements of literary value; as Andreas Huyssen has warned “to reduce all cultural criticism to the problem of quality is a symptom of the anxiety of contamination”.⁴ The work of discovering feminist forerunners for myself, realising and valuing their creativity and achievements has been important to me. But I have also sought to uncover submerged, and uncomfortable, even offensive, ideological and cultural aspects of their work; we need to balance our empathy with recognisably feminist objectives with a critique alert to those discourses. I deliberately chose texts which pose a problematic relationship to the past for the feminist historian, thereby confronting the investments of women in empire, racism, and the eugenicism of racial and sexual maternity, as well as finding and valuing radical, progressive values.

Clearly feminism in itself is not an indicator of how “acceptable” an author is in terms of her treatment of gender or other identity politics. Female aesthetes produced texts which in their formal and stylistic approaches participatory in a productive Paterian ambiguity and playfulness, typically eluded the more dogmatic outcomes of New Woman eugenic polemics.

As my study of the dynamics of imperialism and eugenicism in Grand and Cross's fiction has shown, advancing women's issues and rights may be based on the exclusion of certain groups of women or Others; the construct of "woman" and the problems of exclusion it presents even to today's feminism is one still in need of urgent address, as critics such as Elizabeth V. Spelman have cogently argued.⁵

The construction of history from a present-day perspective is inevitable, so we need to confront what our investments are in doing historical research, what we choose to value and choose to omit, just as for feminists of the 1890s, knowledge of the past could be used to act in the service of the future. Feminist history whilst identifying and assessing women's agency as modern subjects must simultaneously acknowledge the investments through which that power is produced if it aims to revise our relationship to these nineteenth-century histories of gender and race relations. My assessment of the extent to which the New Woman's use of scientific narratives were successful is derived from a viewpoint that Rita Felski has described as one which aims "to retain an awareness of the discursive possibilities that were available at a given historical moment".⁶ The turn-of-the-century women's movement made strategic use of those possibilities, interrogating and appropriating scientific debates; living, and writing into being new female subjectivities.

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (1983; Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993): 190.

² See Vernon Lee, 'The Economic Parasitism of Women' (1902) *Gospels of Anarchy and Other Contemporary Studies* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908).

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887) Ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1989): 37.

⁴ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture and Postmodernism*. (London: Macmillan, 1986): ix.

⁵Elizabeth V. Spelman, *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (London: Women's Press, 1988).

⁶Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1995): 34.

Appendix: Texts of Poems.

Emily Jane Pfeiffer

‘To Nature’ (1880)

Dread force, in whom of old we loved to see
 A nursing mother, clothing with her life
 The seeds of Love divine – with what sore strife
 We hold or yield our thoughts of Love and thee!
 Thou are not “calm”, but restless as the ocean,
 Filling with aimless toil the needless years –
 Stumbling on thought and throwing off the spheres,
 Churning the Universe with mindless motion.

Dull fount of joy, unhallowed source of tears,
 Cold motor of our fervid faith and song
 Dead, but engendering life, love, pangs, and fears,
 Thou crownedst thy wild work with foulest wrong
 When first thou lighted to a seeming goal
 And darkly blundered on man’s suffering soul.

Elizabeth A. Sharp (ed.) *Women’s Voices: An Anthology of the Most Characteristic Poems By English, Scotch, and Irish Women* (London: Walter Scott, 1887): 277.

Emily Jane Pfeiffer

'Evolution' (1880)

Hunger that strivest in the restless arms
 Of the sea-flower, that drivest rooted things
 To break their moorings, that unfoldest wings
 In creatures to be rapt above thy harms;
 Hunger, of whom the hungry-seeming waves
 Were the first ministers, till, free to range,
 Thou mad'st the Universe thy park and grange,
 What is it thine insatiate heart still craves?

Sacred disquietude, divine unrest!
 Maker of all that breathes the breath of life
 No unthrift greed spurs thine unflagging zest
 No lust self-slaying hounds thee to the strife
 Thou art the Unknown God on whom we wait:
 Thy path the course of our unfolded fate.

Elizabeth A. Sharp, *Women's Voices*: 276.

Mary F. Robinson

'Darwinism' (1888)

When first the unflowering fern-forest
Shadowed the dim lagoons of old,
A vague, unconscious, long unrest
Swayed the great fronds of green and gold.

Until the flexible stem grew rude,
The fronds began to branch and bower,
And lo! Upon the unblossoming wood
There breaks a dawn of apple-flower.

Then on the fruitful forest-boughs
For ages long the unquiet ape
Swung happy in his airy house
And plucked the apple, and sucked the grape.

Until at length in him there stirred
The old, unchanged, remote distress,
That pierced his world of wind, and bird
With some divine unhappiness.

Not love, nor the wild fruits he sought,
Nor the fierce battle of his clam

Could still the unborn and aching thought,
Until the brute became the man

Long since; and now the same unrest
Goads to the same invisible goal
Till some new gift, undream'd unguess'd,
End the new travail of the soul

Isobel Armstrong, Joseph Bristow and Cath Sharrock (eds.) *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 731.

May Kendall

'Woman's Future' (1887)

Complacent they tell, hard hearts and derisive,
In vain is our ardour: in vain are our sighs:
Our intellects, bound by a limit decisive,
To the level of Homer's may never arise.
We heed not the falsehood the base innuendo,
The laws of the universe, these are our friends
Our talents shall rise in a mighty crescendo,
We trust Evolution to make us amends!

But ah, when I ask you for food that is mental
My sisters, you offer me ices and tea!

You cherish the fleeting , the mere accidental
 At cost of the True, the Intrinsic, the Free.
 Your feelings, compressed in Society's mangle,
 Are vapid and frivolous, pallid and mean.
 To slander you love; but you don't care to wrangle:
 You bow to Decorum, and cherish Routine.

Alas, is it woolwork you take for your mission,
 Or Art that your fingers so gaily attack?
 Can patch work atone for the mind's inanition?
 Can the soul, oh my sisters, be fed on a *plaque*?
 Is this your vocation? My goal is another,
 And empty and vain is the end you pursue.
 In antimacassars the world you may smother;
 But intellect marches o'er them and o'er you.

On Fashion's vagaries your energies strewing,
 Devoting your days to a rug or a screen,
 Oh, rouse to a lifework – do something worth doing!
 Invent a new plant, a flying-machine.
 Mere charms superficial, mere feminine graces,
 That fade or that flourish no more you may prize;
 But the knowledge of Newton will beam from your faces,
 The soul of a Spencer will shine in your eyes.

ENVOY

Though jealous exclusion may tremble to own us,
 Oh, wait for the time when our brains shall expand!
 When once we're enthroned, you shall never dethrone us-
 The poets, the sages, the seers of the land!

Armstrong, Bristow and Sharrock (eds.) *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets*: 763.

May Kendall**'Education's Martyr' (1887)**

He loved the peculiar plants and rare,
 For any plant he did not care
 That he had seen before;
 Primroses by the river's brim
 Dicotyledons were to him
 And they were nothing more.

The mighty cliffs we bade him scan,
 He banned them for Laurentian
 With sad dejected mien.
 "Than all this bleak Azoic rock,"
 he said, "I'd sooner have a block –
 ah me! – of Pleistocene!"

His eyes were bent upon the sand;
 He owned the *scenery* was grand,
 In a reproachful voice;
 But if a centipede he found,
 He'd fall before it on the ground,
 And worship and rejoice.

We spoke of Poets dead and gone,
 Of that Maeonian who shone
 O'er Hellas like a star:
 We talked about the King of Men, –
 "Observe", he said, "the force of *κεν*
 And note the use of *χαρ*!"*

Yes, all that has been or may be,
 States, beauties, battles, land and sea,
 The matin songs of larks,
 With glacier, earthquake, avalanche
 To him were each a separate "branch",
 And stuff for scoring marks!

Ah! happier he who does not know
 The power that makes the Planets go,
 The slaves of Kepler's Laws;

Who finds not glands in joy or grief,
 Nor in the blossom and the leaf,
 Seeks for the secret Cause!

Armstrong, Bristow and Sharrock (eds) *Nineteenth-Century Women Poets*: 762.

*The editors give *κεν* as a modal participle with verbs which has several functions, and *γαρ* as “for”.

Grant Allen

‘For Amy Levy’s Urn’ (1894)

This bitter age that pits our maids with men
 Wore out her woman’s heart before its time:
 Too wan and pale,
 She strove to scale
 The icy peaks of unimagined rhyme.
 There, worlds broke sunless on her frightened ken;
 The mountain air stuck chill on her frail breath:
 Fainting she fell, all weary with her climb,
 And kissed the soft, sweet lips of pitying death.

Grant Allen, *The Lower Slopes: Reminiscences of Excursions Around the Base of Helicon, Undertaken for the Most Part in Early Manhood* (London: Elkin Matthews & John Lane of Bodley Head, 1894): 21.

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